



# GROUND

THE FALL ISSUE

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**YOUR AD COULD BE HERE**

# EDITORIAL

Berlin, October 21st 2015

It was a long and wonderful summer in Berlin; open airs, cold mate, techno and the fleeting presence of international young tourists. That lime yellow lights of the sunsets from Oberbaumbrücke and the playlist of my iPod.

This Summer I closed a period of three years for a new sense of freedom, for survival, like waking up from a nightmare that was making somebody else's dreams come true, but "no more" I said. Now I am proud to present you the first issue of the new phase of GROUND (formerly know as Nightground), with the *harvest fest*. The Autumn begins and so we present you our first issue that plays with the season's name. Although we were late to be out, we used the term Fall, instead of Autumn to remark the gravity of time and that in the cyclic spheres we live in, things one day must fall.

For the Fall Issue would be good that our readers acknowledge there were three call for contributions; the first call titled *deutschland* meant to motivate contributors to delimit their perimeters and range of action to the new geographical context of this compendium, Germany. The second call was composed of keywords in order to ease the contributors focused on visual materials; *Intimacy, Privacy and Trespassing*. For the third call, there was more of research from our editorial team. Concerned by the global political climate in matter of border crossing and refugees crisis in Europe, the call was titled *Irony & Solidarity*.

We now leave you alone from here to surf through our first issue's pages, and highly motivate you to give us feedbacks and impressions at the end of the compendium.

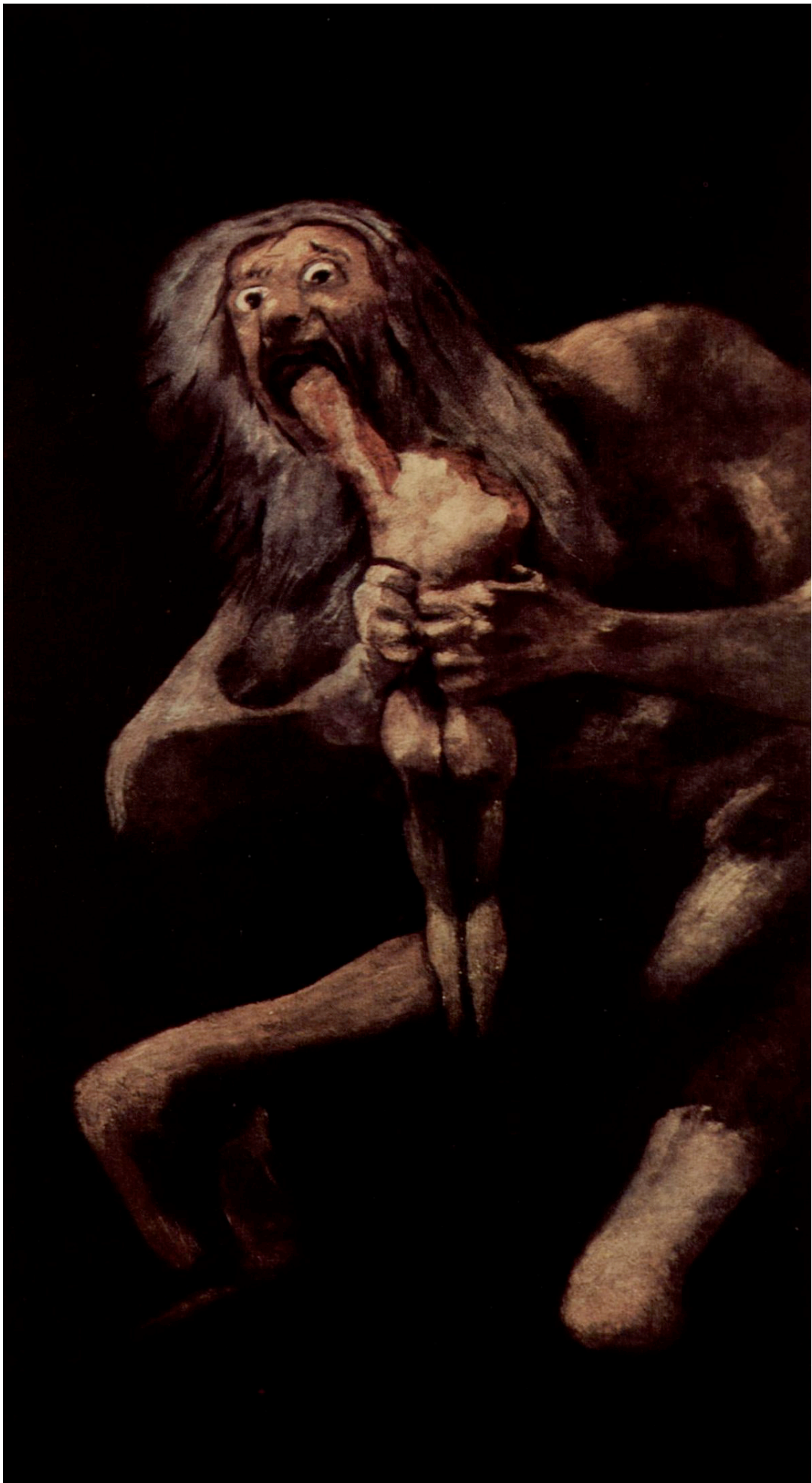
  
Ismael Ogando  
Editor in chief

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**AGAINST  
YOUTH!**



By the time the Ibrahim Mahama<sup>1</sup> scandal broke and The New York Times published the article titled “Emerging Art is Cooling Off”<sup>2</sup>, the writing was already on the wall for emerging art, which has been booming off the charts for the past decade. At its zenith over the course of 2014 and 2015, art market press articles with titles like “why nothing is the same any more...” or “this will change everything....” grew as galling as protestations by gallerists or a collector decrying the changes in the world of art since the golden days of the 1980s. Yes, it has been a sad time for anyone for whom art was invented exactly 35 years ago in Manhattan, when the rents were cheaper than cheap and Andy Warhol could hang out with Madonna and Basquiat.

Perhaps the cult of youth in contemporary art can indeed be traced back to that eulogized era. Over the past few years, it has been increasingly difficult to argue against the market drive, which insists that an artist can reach his or her peak by the age of 28, despite the odd two thousand years of documented history of art, demonstrating exactly the opposite. In the age of Instagram, flipping and the infinite art boom, when anything can be art and more importantly sold as art even Great Financial Crisis of 2008 is too long ago! In this cauldron of ahistoricism, the arrival of the “I told you so moment” was always a matter of simple logic addressed to art history, with a trifle of business acumen and human psychology.

First to art history and history of artists. Even the scantest view, reveals that substantial majority of artists reach their creative maturity well towards their late 40s. Until then their style is unstable, evolves unpredictably and is greatly influenced by their peers and historical predecessors. Visual artists are notoriously long-living and productive to the end, not to sound cliché but Leonardo and Michelangelo lived well into their 80s at the time when the average lifespan was around 45. So it would beggar belief that the finest work of any one artist is executed in the first quarter of their career. History shows that this is in fact not the case for any greats one cares to mention, think early Rothko, Kandinski, Miro, Twombly or Duchamp.

It has been tempting to think that the advent of online culture has marked a profound paradigm shift in art. But while glib headlines speak about spectacular prices for emerging artists, the biggest amounts of money in art is still spent on paintings by “masters” (modern and otherwise) i.e. works by artists with longevity, pedigree and history.

This makes every kind of business sense. While young artists have been swept up in the zeitgeist of believing that now-a-days rich people have become enamored with throwing enormous amount of money at every bright young new thing regardless of merit and provenance, this is far from the case. Emerging art is only the tip of the financial iceberg that is the art market. Despite the “learned” opinion of an av-



erage young artist, people with money who have been enticed to enter the art market in the recent years, are not easily led fools.

Sure contemporary art appears to have become “Hollywoodised”. It is hard to miss the Kehinde Wileys and Basquiats in every other shot of “Empire” and giant paintings becoming a must-have backdrops in every Hollywood movie. However it is naïve to believe that this phenomenon is entirely driven and dictated by hype. Many of the so-called “new collectors” might be drawn to art as the new “it” thing and their early moves may indeed be guided by self-styled gurus like Stefan Simchowitz. However many of these are people with experience in investment and analysis and very quick to discover that despite the hype and opportunity to speculate, unlike stocks and shares, which are ultimately pieces of paper representing value, art is in fact something far more concrete.

More than that, (and now for a little psychology), regardless of how one starts engagement with art as a collector, one thing is true about all collecting – it is entirely addictive. This

addiction is not abstract or detached. It requires relationships, not just with art but also with artists, with galleries and demands inevitably increasing in-depth knowledge, attachment, evolution of an independent taste and orientation. It follows logically that even the collectors, who stumble into art for ulterior motives, will not indefinitely rely on someone’s say so in their decisions. Even if they treat art as investment, they cannot help but learn about art and its history, because even speculating in stock, shares and options, requires as much knowledge. Inevitably, they will then learn that the price of art is not illusory but based on discrete parameters of value. They will also realize that if they focus on young art only it is inevitable that less than 10% of their art “portfolio” will be performing long term. So in order to reduce risk, they need to look at errr... artists with a longer and better track record. And so we arrive at the new flavour of articles starting to arrive in my in-box, such as “25 Most Collectible Mid-career artists”, from Blouin... just in.

1. “Ibrahim Mahama of Ghana (born in 1987) became one of the most talked-about artists at this year’s Venice Biennale after creating a monumental 300-meter installation lined with jute bags that runs through the event’s main “All the World’s Futures” exhibition. Another Mahama jute bag — sacks used to transport coal — is included in the “New Now” sale. Presented on a stretcher to resemble a painting, and signed and dated 2014, it is estimated at \$12,000 to \$18,000.... On June 15, the Los Angeles collector and dealer Stefan Simchowitz and the Dublin gallerist Jonathan Ellis King (who presented an exhibition of Mr. Mahama’s work last December and January), filed a civil suit in U.S. District Court in California against the artist. The suit claims the artist broke a contract with the dealers by declaring in May that none of the 294 individual signed jute-bag pieces he had supplied to the dealers was his work, and by saying that he had not agreed to the “commercialization” of his artworks. According to the suit, Mr. Simchowitz and Mr. Ellis King paid Mr. Mahama £90,000 for the sacking material and a fabricator \$67,000 to mount the individual bags on wooden stretchers. The suit claims that 27 of the works (similar to the one at Phillips, which the auction house said by phone has no connection with this case), had been sold for an average of \$16,700 each, making the remaining unsold inventory valued at \$4.45 million.”

2. *ibid*

# SWIMMING

Alice Jones









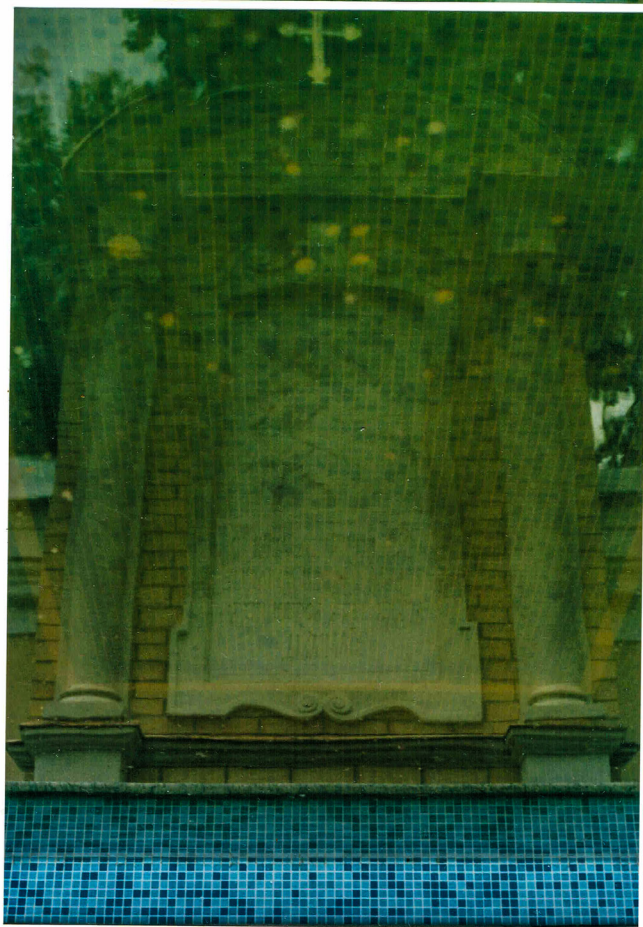
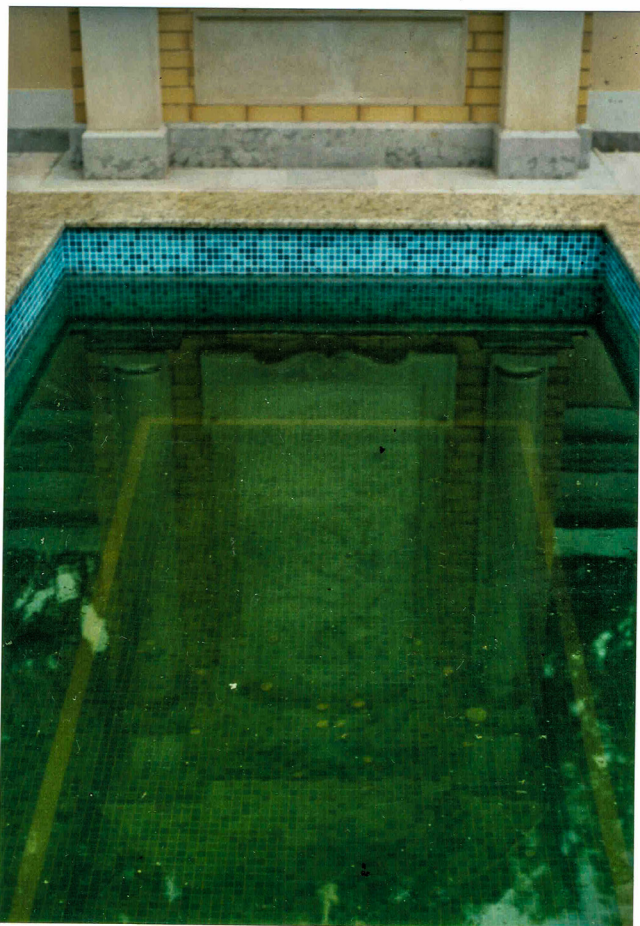




















# BERLIN HAS



# RUINED ME!





# Would you believe it if I told you that I love London in the same way Woody Allen adores New York City?

I mean you've heard me moan and groan about this great alpha city, just like Alan Konigsberg in any number of films set in the Big Apple. You've seen me bang my fist on the table in protest. You've been told by people who take great interest in my business and its chronicling that I was overheard vehemently disapproving of this and that initiative, unashamedly calling almost every redevelopment scheme sexed-up gentrification.

Excuse me but isn't this what loving something is? Being mad at it. Remonstrating... expressing how much you hate it; what you hate about it.

Well, would you also believe it if I told you that I was convinced nothing compared to living in London... Nothing came close to walking its streets. Until I went to Berlin.

It's true. Berlin did something to me. It blew me away. It really did. In fact, upon my return to London, I told the world. I naively announced it. Like a chump— like a child, a snot-nosed runt (and no, runt is not a misspelling) I updated my facebook status with the following message:

Berlin has ruined me. Suddenly I can't be anywhere and not compare it to that city. Well, should London defeat me, I'm sorry Mrs. Jackson but your son's moving there.

Mind you, when I was in Berlin, it was freezing; the cold had a fiendish bite. Next to it, London's a tropical, concrete jungle.

Berlin was in flux. It wasn't a paradise. Someone in an orange helmet was forever operating some heavy-duty machinery. Everything seemed like it was on the verge of restoration, renovation, tidying or would shortly be subject to disruptions from construction work nearby. I found the sky despite the noise pollution, to come in two colours: blue and clear or white with clouds. Almost everyone I sat opposite on the bus, the tram or the train didn't speak English. And then almost everyone I stood next to in some bar or club or music venue was either American or British.

It was strange. I found it strange. You should have seen my brow furrow. Wrinkles came and found me when I was there. I've been trying to shake them off ever since.

It was as if in the day the city was populated by ordinary German folk who went about their business, politely, courteously, keeping their distance and then in the evening, you had this nuclear-generated energy from tourists, expatriates and English speakers conversing in the only language they understood with the Germans, the Swedish and the Danish.

A friend of mine whose love for me makes my solitude feel like it won't be forever told me that there are a lot of Finnish people in Berlin.

I didn't see that. I didn't see that at all. Not that I looked for them. I never do. The last country I think a Scandinavian

is from tends to be Finland. I guess that could be down to the fact that I think I know enough Fins already... All 6 of them. I'm not looking to acquaint myself with anymore. They can't be Finnish because I hope they're not. It's kinda childish, isn't it?

Like I was saying before... there seemed to be Germans galore in the day and English speakers defibrillating East Berlin in the night-time and I barely spoke to anyone I didn't know or wasn't introduced to except to ask for directions.

Now, things happened in Berlin that I will never tell anyone; things that are locked in this old heart of mine. Then other things happened which I might be cagey about but I can share with people, with you; for the simple fact that writing is a different matter. It feels impersonal somehow, even when it's quite dear. It's the act of typing maybe. It's distancing. It's expressionless; unlike my face. Do you know...? I woke up with two more spots today. I want to do something about them, but then I scar easily. I bruise more often than not and then when I'm sick or get a cold, I go lighter and my face shows all these marks.

Let me tell you about where I stayed. It was on Oranienburger Straße. It was in the central part of the East. Technically it was East Berlin. Although on the U-Bahn map it did seem a little northerly.

In the day it was peaceful and frequented by people who'd come to see the New Synagogue and at night time, there were prostitutes... More about them later. My reason for the trip to

Berlin was to write 50,000 words; averaging 10,000 a day. I gave myself 8 days. I intended to write the body of my book and then combine that with the back stories to the characters I had already written in London. The name of the book is the Brute Brit and the Brutish British.

The title is prickly to say out loud. It looks gauche. It's not meant to be something a person is at peace with. It evokes the feeling that it needs to be changed and that's just fine with me. I wouldn't have it any other way.

It's a revenge story. It's about a man of questionable ideals who employs the worst sort of people to help him exact revenge. He's a brute and the people he employs are brutal. They have no mercy. And if there was one city I thought would inspire me to write a hard-boiled thriller, Berlin is it. I guess it's because of its history. It's especially prominent in the East. You can feel it. The penumbra resonates, the Cold War lingers.

Once I walked from Oranienburger Straße to Kottbusser Tor and I took a wrong turn because the directions I had were in Deutsche and I can barely say goodbye in the language... I found myself walking through this dark, long street that cut across a small river. It was an especially biting night; colder and immensely bitterer than all the others; and all the apartments were vacant. It was eerie. The block was so contemptuous; it felt like it was anomalous; like it had me up against the wall. The windows didn't have curtains and if you looked long and hard enough you might just convince yourself that





you saw something move in the shadows... a face spying on you or a hand motioning you to come its way. It was that disconcerting. And there I was, walking past it, ignoring the fact that the Art Galleries on the ground floor had the most peculiar collection of works on their window displays. I got to a park and I daren't walk through it. I was warned that there were Drug dealers in there... Drug dealers and no lights... Africans who were considerably darker and presumably sweeter than me; and it was alleged that sometimes you'd get a hand come out of nowhere, balled because there was an 8-ball in there... a price was said, an exchange was made and then that hand retracted whence it came from and you'd swear that the hand didn't have a body. It lived in the shadows.

Well I kept to the road, taking the first turn I could... to try and get back on the correct route; and as I walked past the park's entrance, guess what I should see...? A girl. A girl of my age. Standing. In the shadows. She was so striking and without fear. She looked scholarly. She stood in the shadows, looking clean, seeming well-strung together and I walked in her direction and she didn't flinch. She didn't cower. My presence didn't put her on edge. In fact, it was me who felt ill at ease. Although she obviously wasn't a drug dealer, I was very aware of her. She also didn't seem to be soliciting. I wanted to know what she was doing there. Anything can lurk in there. Forget the drug dealers; they wouldn't shit where they lived. Anything can be hidden there.

As I walked past her, on wretched edge, I realised that I should correct that thought. She was the anything.

And such was Berlin. Women seemed so empowered. They seemed to be saying...

'I'm the one you should be afraid of.'

Or 'you'd best watch your step when I'm in the vicinity.'

For instance, there was something precious and predatory about the way she lurked. Brutish and elegant, maybe. Almost as if the thing, the creature which might be hidden in the shadows was remaining hidden because of her. Such was the power she held and such was the character I wished for my characters to have. That sense that while they're in the world, the Devil was staying away. They're all the dread the world needs.

Does this sound awful? I hope it doesn't. It's not meant to be dreadful or provocative.

Let me do something to disarm you. Let me demonstrate how humane I am. Let me tell you something that I wasn't going to tell a living soul. It wasn't my proudest moment. It showed me for the coward I can be. Don't you worry mother of mine... mother of mine reading this, the prostitutes don't feature in this part.

So on the last day, with 4 hours left before I had to be at the airport... on a cloudy Wednesday afternoon, I decided to visit 2 castles.

My friend circled their locations on the map.

She took time from her lunch; she made the effort; in short, she showed me how to walk from the station to



them and guess what I went and did? Not intentionally of course.

I went and forgot the map at the place I was staying in!

So there I was on the U-Bahn with my hand luggage lumbered over my shoulder, negotiating my way through the Eastern part of Berlin without the clearest indication of where it was I was trying to get to. Just one name calling out to me Spindlersfeld.

The other one was a gamble. It could have been Neukölln

It could have been Rathaus Neukölln.

Or it could even have been Britz-Süd.

So I thought... well, let's find the first place since I roughly know what the second one is and it's nearer the Berlin-Schönefeld airport.

I set out on my way and low and behold, I got lost.

Or rather I lost my way.

I came out of one station in particular and decided that I was going to ask the first person I sensed warmth emitting from about how to get to this castle.

I wasn't done walking down the corridor and then doubling back on myself to return to the platform when an elderly, seemingly disenchanted woman walked past me. As she did so, she looked at me, encircling me and then suddenly, she came to life. She approached me... with a Watch Tower pamphlet reaching out to me, acting as an extension to her hand.

Although I was relieved to be noticed I kept moving. I knew better than to talk to people I didn't know, despite the fact that I was in need. It was dark in that part of the station and the only things

visible were my teeth and her blonde hair. The two things are incapable of having a conversation with each other. As I hurried away from her in the direction of the platform, I stated the obvious... I said that I was in a hurry... I must get to an airport. I had a flight to catch.

At that point I had to look at where I was actually walking or whose path I was about to shortly collide with for I hadn't been watching where I was going. I didn't want to suddenly find my face connecting with the jaw-line of someone I'd just walked into. This meant that I had my back to the woman and the platform stretched before me and my incredibly heavy bag.

Shortly, I turned to see what had happened to her when low and behold, she was but a couple of feet away. She had followed me and the second our eyes met she said something... something I didn't understand, prompting me to repeat that I was on my way to the airport. My flight was leaving shortly. I was in a hurry.

This was a lie. I had time. I just needed to get away from her. She had the aura of someone you aren't even done saying hello to and you're already taking that hello back and looking for a way to get the hell out of there.

Guess what she said to me... Well, she declared, in the limited English she knew that she could show me how to get to the airport. She said it in a way that implied I was on the wrong platform.

I looked at her, at how she was dressed. She didn't have sick stains on her jacket. Her pink chino trousers were not



dirty from her sitting on the floor, skinning a cigarette. Her hair didn't have leaves and twigs in it. She might have had cuts and scratches on her face but she didn't seem like a resident of the streets.

At reaching that point I decided to come clean with her. I told her that I was actually trying to see a castle before I went to the airport. A friend told me that there was a castle in this area and I wanted to see it beforehand, I repeated myself. She had a blank expression.

I had to repeat this 3 times.

And what happened after that was she told me she could help. I show you, she said.

I was relieved to be receiving this help from someone who seemed normal. So relieved I was that I thanked her repeatedly. Thank you, thank you, thank you, I said.

She led me to another platform and this nonsensically confused me a little. But I didn't say anything.

I was overpowered by the gratitude I felt.

We got on a train that went a different direction. It took us to Sonnenallee.

The journey was rather awkward for me. It was short but peculiar.

The woman was regarding me with reverence. It made me feel uncomfortable.

She seemed to have an instant liking for me and I wasn't sure if I was deserving of it; especially since I had looked at her warily, judgementally, not so long ago.

We got off at that stop and she guided me to the exit.

I thought that would be the end of her tour guide duties, but no Siree.

She took me to a bus stop across the road from the station and my instinct took over. It told me to see just what buses used that stop. I had a feeling there was some kind of a misunderstanding.

My suspicions were confirmed. My hunch was correct. We were at a bus stop I didn't need to use. She had taken me to the stop for buses going to the airport.

I shook my head before I even spoke. There was no way I was going to the airport now, even if it would shake her off.

I needed to see that castle. I wanted to.

I'd spent all my time in Berlin writing that book and now was the time to do some sight-seeing; notwithstanding the fact that it was my last afternoon in this great city.

I asserted myself. I shrunk my English to the smallest size. I dumbled down. I told her in as few words as possible that I wasn't going to the airport. I pointed to the train station and I said castle. I want to see a castle.

I began moving back to the station and she followed me. I went back to our platform, embarrassed by the misunderstanding and as she arrived there at the same time as me, having caught up to me, I pointed at the train I needed to take and I said its name. She looked at me quizzically and I reiterated. She repeated what I said and said it slightly differently and it was then that I suddenly realised what had been bothering me since I first arrived

in Berlin. The language didn't sound how it looked. It read differently. Her pronunciation of the place I was sure I needed to go sounded like the pronunciation for the airport.

In fixing this error, in understanding where we'd gotten our wires crossed, I also comprehended how I had, without warning, ditched the notion of going to the first of the two castles. I was now looking to just go to the second one. The one I knew the name of. The one I kept repeating to her. This change in my goal had happened so suddenly that it must have also confused her. Since not-so-long-ago I was saying to her that there was a castle near where we were and then I was now insisting there was an entirely different place and on top of that, there would be a castle there too. She must have been wondering... what's happened to your plane?

In any case, we boarded the train and we journeyed back to where we met. It was a short trip and the carriage we were in wasn't full.

We got there and disembarked.

As I found my footing at that stop, she was already asking someone about this place I was so insistent existed and a train from this station went to.

The person was a middle aged man and he confirmed my assertion. A train did go to Spindlersfeld.

I pointed out to her that it was on my way to the airport.

She nodded, distantly and I couldn't tell what she was thinking. Why was she still waiting around? I could make my way to that castle without a chaperone. I knew how to get there. I had

lived for 27 years already. It wasn't by accident. Despite appearances, I know my way around the world. Sometimes people take my relaxed manner to mean I'm lax. I'm not. I've never been. I've always known how to get around. I thanked her and I said I'll be fine from this point on and she, good Lord, she insisted. That's right. She insisted she was coming with me. I told her that she didn't have to and she dismissed me through silence. She didn't reply. She just looked at the platform waiting for the train. I looked around where I was and I noticed that nobody seemed to care about me. No one was looking at me curiously; or her for that matter. Me, a twenty-something baby-faced Brit African and her, a sixty something German lady. I didn't need to be anxious. Maybe there was nothing unnatural about this.

A minute before the train pulled up, she looked at me, standing in front of me and having the sun act as a back-light and she commented on how white my teeth were.

I thanked her, taken aback and I immediately, instinctively reverted to my refined inability to take compliments. I dismissed her. It's just the light, I told her. It's the sunlight. It makes them look whiter than they are.

And then just as the train was pulling up, she told me that I was handsome. I blushed. She didn't see it but I blushed. I blushed and I looked down. I really don't know how to take compliments like that. They don't come very often; especially the one about being handsome. The one about my teeth does, but handsome, no Siree. It's a rarity.



Moments later, we got on the train and we weren't there for at least a minute when she told me that I had perfect skin. I was taken aback. Where was this all going? I looked at her and I did my best to say that so does she. Which wasn't true. In the same way that her compliment was false too. I wake up with my face every day, it's far from perfect. It's pretty to look at sometimes but it's not handsome. It's not devastating.

I was embarrassed though to hear this. I felt like I was being hit on. I couldn't separate her comments from the fact that I sometimes go for older women and hence, the blushing.

But of course, not as old as she was. I looked down at the ground and when I looked back up, she was smiling at me. I smiled back. Awkwardly. Ill at ease. And I was suddenly transported back to my 4 months in Malta.

When I was 25 I spent 4 months in the island of Malta. I did an internship there and stayed in a hotel in Saint Julian's with foreigners who were there to learn English at the EC School. I made friends with some of them and we would sometimes go out. I struggled to understand them. They came from Russia, Japan, Turkey, Korea, Spain, Brazil, Greece, Cyprus and Italy. But after a while I started noticing the fact that everyone was coupling up except me. Everyone was finding a bed buddy and interestingly, they were from different countries. They were from different backgrounds and they barely spoke a word of English. One night I watched a friend of mine talking with a girl. The friend was from Turkey and

the girl was from France. I had tried to talk with the both of them to no avail. Although friends with the boy, our conversations were always strained. I observed their interaction and I learnt something as they were kissing after a mere 5 minutes of meeting. The fact that they both didn't speak English had a lot to do with what happened between the two of them in that short space of time. The friend said hello to her. She said hello back. He asked her where she was from. She told him and asked him the same. He asked her how long she was staying in Malta for. She replied and asked that question too. Add another minute of this back and forth, pre-school chit-chat and then you had silence. They had run out of English words. They had run out and the best they could do was either stare at each other, get some more drinks or walk away. Well they were both already drunk and their friends had seemingly buggered off and a good minute had passed since they last said something. The boy suddenly said to the girl, using up his reserve English words... you're beautiful. The girl blushed. They stared for another minute and then they started kissing. And that was that.

Let me bring you back to the present past. She, a sixty-something year old, just told me I had good skin. I looked down, embarrassed. I should have protested but I didn't. I should have said I have bumps she can't see because of the light but I kept my mouth shut. I kept it shut and I blushed.

And then I looked up to see her staring.

I quickly looked back down and the



next time I looked up again, the woman was going for the kill!

She was going for my lips!

Thank God I turned my head to the side at the nick of time. She got my right cheek!

The only reaction I had was not reacting! I was astounded but I tried to play it down.

I shook my head slightly, in a way only she could see. I didn't want to be loud or brash or draw attention to what almost happened. There were people on the train already staring at us; at her and her Watch Tower pamphlets and me and my Grace Jones looks. I had to underplay it and hope the moment passed.

And thanks to a couple of 8 year old boys, it did. The moment passed. They giggled, which didn't help but in so doing, they drew her attention to them.

They had a couple of toys with them and she started talking to them in German. Their father was with them, sitting with their dog which was on a leash.

At first, the boys were trying to talk to me too but the lack of German on my part made that impossible so they eventually gave up; meaning she had their attention and a strange thing started happening. She would talk to them and then look at me and at the beginning they were reverential; they were interested in me despite our language problems, but as she talked worried looks began to sip to the surface of their faces. Most worried was their father.

I had no idea what she was saying to them until she said to me... Colonial, wrong.

My mind raced at a hundred kilometres a second to piece together why they were wary of her.

She went back to talking to them, much to the disgruntlement of their father and as they were replying to a question she just posed, with everyone on the carriage looking at us suspiciously I came to a sudden conclusion...

She was schooling them on race relations.

She was teaching them not to grow up to be racist.

She wasn't being subtle.

She wasn't using gentle language to ease them into the notion that we're all equal.

She was being loud and somewhat brash and everyone on that carriage knew I was the example.

I was the token Black man she was using to make her point.

I felt so embarrassed. I thought this was quite possibly the most uncomfortable situation I've ever found myself in. I couldn't contribute or dispute whatever it was she was saying about me. It was all in German. Her intentions were good but I couldn't condone the way she was going about it.

Luckily, the father and his children got off the train before us... We had a few more stops to go... and as she was waving goodbye to them, he was looking at me with a sympathetic smile. I hoped that meant he absolved me of whatever it was that she said on my behalf.

Soon, we got to my stop and my wish that she would stay at the station and get the first train back to where I met her didn't come true. She walked with me









all the way to the old town, occasionally forcing me to stop as she handed people some more of the Watch Tower pamphlets. I noticed that she was targeting men mostly. She was so warm towards them and it made me apprehensive. I shouldn't have been a coward. I should have crossed the line. I should have kept walking like them, like they were; away from her.

I did wonder if I should walk away at one point, but my conscience reminded me that I had made it that far because of her help or she was here because she thought she was helping. It wouldn't be nice to ditch her now.

And so I resorted to taking in this beautiful place. And boy, oh boy... was it beautiful. It had this lake whose crossing of was enabled by a bridge. I was a little scared she might throw me overboard. She wore seriousness in a scary way. And she was serious whenever she wasn't talking. Well the buildings featured my favourite choice of colours in this old town: red, tiled roofs, dark yellow walls and the blue sky behind them; one of the primary colours of Berlin when the weather loved the city... I looked at the time as I was walking through the old city with her and I realised that at the rate we were going, I would end up missing my plane. I either needed to pick up my speed to see some more of the place or we needed to start journeying back. It had taken us 15 minutes to walk from the station to the other side of this bridge. She was tired now. Tired and determined to give more of those pamphlets to people; so it would take us double the time.

Her pace and her posture wouldn't let me walk briskly so I heavy-heartedly decided to start making my way back; without seeing the castle even!

It was so unfair. But I had brought it on myself. I should have deserted her a long time ago.

As we were turning a corner, I saw this magnificent cathedral. It was so beautiful and somewhat gothic. It took my breath away. I stood there, looking at it, awe-stricken, and she regarded me with this disdainful look. Pure contempt. I was so spooked by it. And then, do you know what she said... Just one word...

Hitler.

She said Hitler and I was very rattled. What was that supposed to mean? Could she elaborate?

But no, she didn't. She said Hitler, looked at me judgementally and then kept walking in the direction of the bridge, the bridge that would lead us back to the station and the station whose train would take us back to the place where we first met.

We travelled in silence. And by the time we got there, I had decided that I wouldn't care how she reacted... this time I was going to be insistent. I was going to thank her for her time, for her two hours and then I would get on the train to the airport and leave without her. This was ridiculous. It had gone on for too long. I hadn't wanted this chaperoning business to begin with. The last time I went sight-seeing with a girl in that kind of capacity, it was in Spain... in Madrid, Valencia and Barcelona and upon returning to London, we never spoke again.

We got off the train and I told the old woman that I was grateful and I hoped that she had a good evening.

Guess what she said... goodbye.

That's right. She said goodbye.

I was so relieved, and then suddenly I wasn't.

She said that so happily, like being separated from me was the best thing that could have happened to her.

I was taken aback.

It was like she also couldn't wait not to see me again.

I stood there, watching her shake my hand in a way that made it known we would definitely be going our separate paths and that would be fine with her.

Had it been the case that she hadn't meant to be my chaperone?

Had she misunderstood what I was saying because her English was pretty dreadful?

Had I roped her into going to all these places with me when all she wanted was to give me that Watch Tower pamphlet and be on her merry way?

Maybe.

Who knows what's lost, or found or made up, in translation?

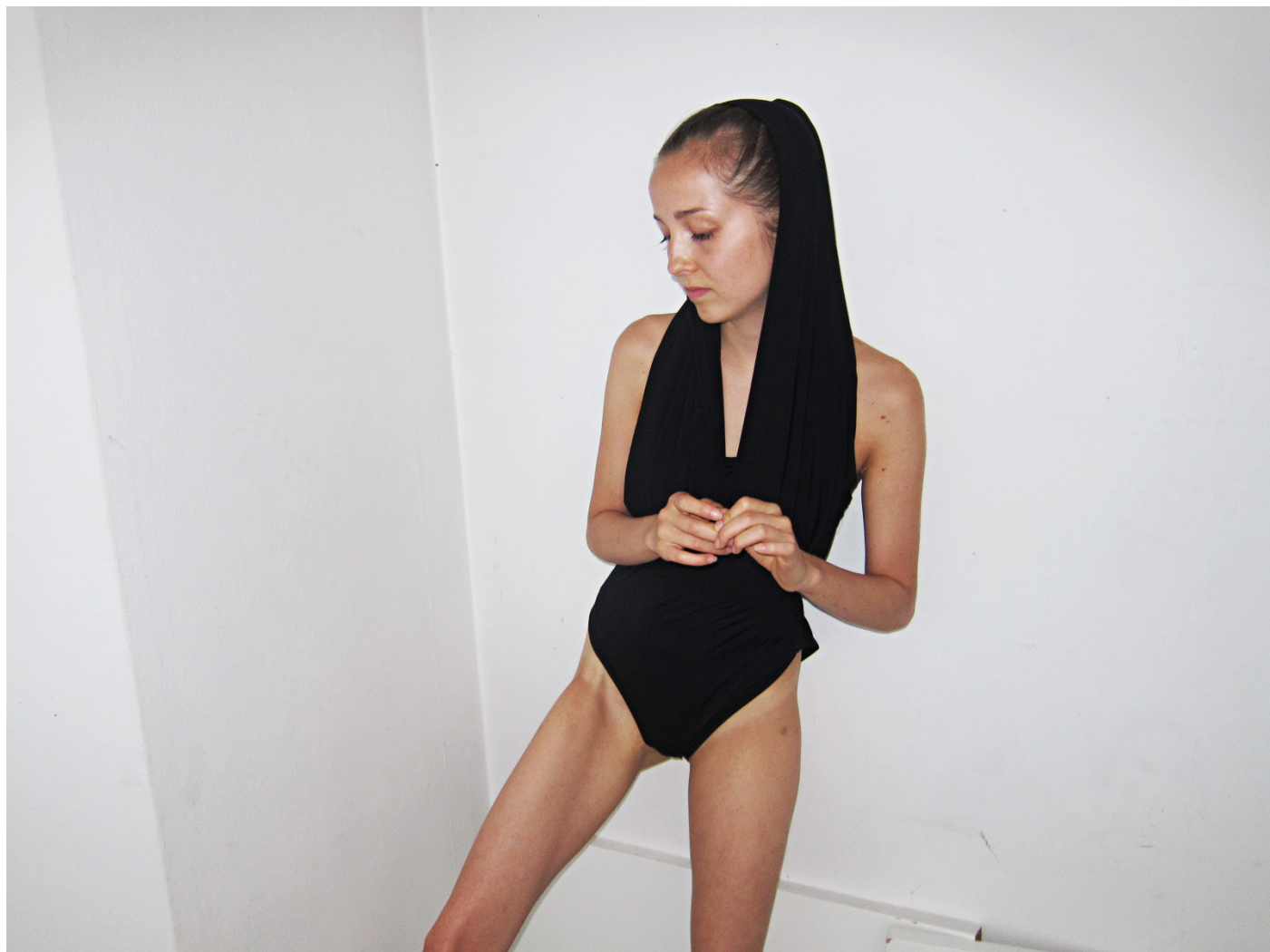
What about the prostitutes, you wonder.

Well, their story takes a few lines to share. Whenever they saw me, they looked upwards, they looked at the ground, they pretended they were on the phone... they slunk back to the shadows. And when they saw men with hunch-backs, men stumbling around, ambling along, drunkenly, man in groups of three, looking like they were a walking surge of testosterone,

they would push out their hips, boost up their breasts, whistle, coo, ooh la la this, hello good looking that, and I felt dreadful for them. Their standards were so low. Rightly so though.

Asked by a joker, a silly friend of mine, who I'd pick... the prostitutes, the girl in the shadows and the old woman, the liberal and the lived, between the familiarity of London and the lure of Berlin... well, I replied, with a cheeky smile... let's just say my mother won't like my answer. She likes having me around.

I'm ruined.









# SHYNES

A conversation with Julia Ag





S  
afonova



**Ismael Ogando.** Julia, why do you photograph?

**Julia Agafonova.** When self-reflection becomes destructive, camera is the best self-defence mechanism. No purpose, no significant commercial profit, but healthy way to stop being an idiot for a while. Mostly I make portraits due to the precious possibility to project own feelings through somebody else and it doesn't matter, if I lie to you or tell the truth.

**IO.** When did your interest for the light begin, did you study photography?

**JA.** I didn't study photography, except attending some lectures and Michael Ackerman's workshop a couple of years ago. The educational question is quite sharp for me in a way, that it's definitely necessary to study photography, but being a dilettante is more like me.

Fortunately, people should always be interested in light if they want to make their shots visible. Light is light, it's beautiful and pervasive. I'm open to many things and for light as well, except the ugly yellow summer happy visual disorder.

**IO.** What's usually on you mind at the moment you hit the trigger of your camera?

**JA.** *Did I remove the dark slide?* - Actually, my best condition is not to think. I see and feel and as a result there's a chance to get a good shot, or I just see and it'll be "just fine"

**IO.** How would you describe you work?

**JA.** Shyness is not nice I should tell you. If I want to make portraits I should find models and talk to them, trying to explain how much I'm bored and they are beautiful, which means that I'm pretty lousy photographer and psychologist.

**IO.** What about friends, what is their opinion about your photos?

**JA.** Close friends of mine always share their opinion, sometimes help with the technics, but usually they want some new portraits

**IO.** Do you share any affinity with other young artists from your city?

**JA.** Not really. But in Saint Petersburg lives a very great and inspiring friend of mine, photographer, who always can give me a good advice and yes, “shares the affinity.”

**IO.** As an artist concerning Russia's political situation, what is your personal approach to this topic, does it affects your creation process in any way?

**JA.** Though my *girlish* art exists apart from a big noisy world, the political situation affects the people I photograph, and it has an influence on me as a person, as a citizen. I see the new strong and bright generation, which I would like to show you.

**IO.** Are books, movies or any others visual / symbolic materials a source of inspiration for you?

**JA.** Sure! It doesn't even need an explanation.

**IO.** On your photograph, I get a tender sense of discomfort and a vague twist of sadness, which would you say are the main emotions you capture or try to project on your pictures?

**JA.** I would say there's mostly dramatic youth fragility and Russian mentality, which are obvious especially among young people. All of them are in their homes, which are meant to be the safest place on earth, but hesitation and fears are all over. I like the idea of being vulnerable regardless of your shelter.

**IO.** What others artists would you say influenced your work? Maybe say if there's any artist which work of art you love.

**JA.** Many artists, painters, musicians and photographers, have an influence on me, but in a quite unsystematic way.

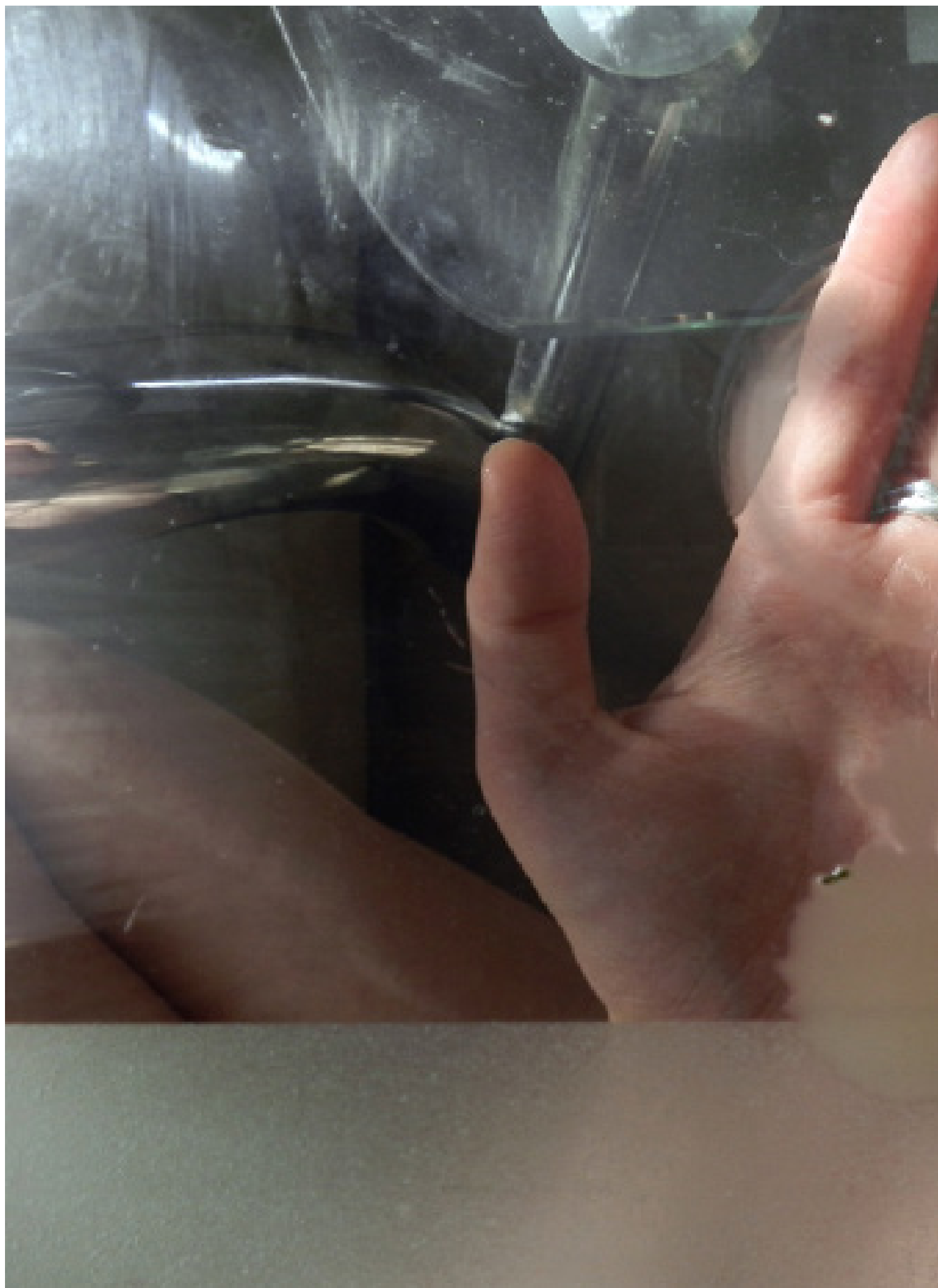
**IO.** Are you working on a coming project? An exhibition maybe?

**JA.** Neither a project nor an exhibition... Procrastination only.















**NEVIN  
ALADAG**



**Antoine Geneviev.** Can you introduce yourself for our readers?

**Nevin Aladag.** I was born in Turkey 1972 and less than a year later our parents emigrated with us to Stuttgart. The film that is being shown at Wentrup Gallery is the first big art piece I did in my hometown (Stuttgart) where I was brought up. I studied sculpture at the Fine Arts Academy in Munich, from 1994 to 2000. My professor was Olaf Metzel; who is now also working with Wentrup Gallery.

**Heiko Thandeka Ncube.** I actually just had lunch with Olaf Metzel, he said that he was very proud of you.

**NA.** He was a very good professor - there are some good artists that have come out of his class, not talking about myself obviously, and he is still teaching. I got a residency at the Künstlerhaus Bethanien back in 2003, when it was still in the building down the road. That's one reason I moved to Berlin and because my boyfriend Daniel Knorr who was also studying with Olaf, moved to Berlin two years before me. Ever since then I have been based here.

**AG.** Can you tell me about your current piece exhibiting at Wentrup?

**NA.** The main piece is called 'Traces' - a three channel video installation. I call it an 'experimental orchestral sound piece with images'. The idea was to

make a portrait of the city which in this case I also have an emotional connection too. I wanted to somehow make reference to the population by the choice of instruments and the culture. I chose a selection of instruments, from the violin, to the pan flute, to the accordion and the harmonica. They're linked to the orchestra but they're also instruments that are used in public spaces. I found all the instruments for this piece in Stuttgart and decided to make the city the protagonist and a musician. It is not a human being or body that is playing them but the city itself, the environment. Which means the architecture of the city; the street surfaces and different elements of Stuttgart play the instruments - such as the playgrounds, the asphalt, lamps, the trees etc. I also used the wind and the hills; for instance when you hold an instrument out of a moving car. *Traces* is talking about the sound of the city and its identity without actually showing the people.

**AG.** When I was watching *Traces*, I noticed similarities to the *City Language* series and *Session*, are these two series connected?

**NA.** Yes, you are right. I shot *Session* in 2013 for the Sharjah Biennial. It is comparable to the *City Language* series and *Traces*. I was the first time for me to be in an Arab Emirate. When I was researching instruments there I realised that they were mainly percussion instruments from India, Pakistan, Iran and

Iraq, where many of the migration workers come from. The instruments are again substituting for the people living there. *Session* is based mainly on percussion instruments, therefore it is more rhythmic. The instruments are as the people linked to the nature in which they live in and sometimes suffer from it as it is also very challenging. In *Session* I didn't use any extra tool apart from nature to play the instruments where as in the Stuttgart (*Traces*) I was also including public sculptures such as the statues or the playground to make the instruments play. *Traces* is more melodic and orchestral.

**AG.** I noticed there is a certain amount of humour in your work; you seem to be constantly playing with audience's emotions. Why is this important for your work?

**NA.** First of all I like to have fun while I produce a piece but mainly through the language of humour you can get to the bottom of things. Through humour I find an easier way to achieve different layers of seriousness, starting with a light beginning.

**AG.** Does your training as a sculptor influence your video art?

**NA.** I guess from thinking as a sculptor one considers the whole space including the surreal and narrative rather more than the two-dimensional and simply functional. In film one has many layers of space and

dimensions to deal with. I always try to emulate the knowledge I have from sculpture.

**AG.** What is your favourite artistic medium to use?

**NA.** I started with super8 animations when I applied for art school and I also did little narrative stage settings. Although I still wouldn't say that film or video is my favourite medium - it really depends on what story I want to tell. I do choreograph performance, I do works on paper, objects and video installations - It really depends on what I want to tell.

I have always used new mediums and means of experimenting. When I was asked to do a performance in 2007 I replied that I'm not a performance artist but these categories don't exist anymore. I ended up doing one and it was a great experience as it opened up new levels to think about the object, the narrative and the sound. I was not performing myself but choreographing it including sculptural works of mine, included experimental musical layers. The title is *Raise the Roof*. When I had previously thought of doing a performance it meant acting like a performer and I'm not a stage person; I would never perform myself on stage. I come from a family where there are lots of directors, I think I'm a better director.

**AG.** What are you currently working on at the moment?

**NA.** I'm working on a new per-







formance piece as I have been invited to do something for the art fair in Istanbul in September. The title is *Move* it is based on the research of different ways to move along in public space.

Each Performer embodies a different style and character, not necessarily equivalent to its own age or gender. With the consequently repeated movement sequences and the interruptions, which are the individual Poses, each Performer becomes part of the visitors of the art fair and merges in.

So mainly I am observing how people walk in public space. There is so many conscious or automatic ways to express yourself while walking from A to B. I would like to emphasize different characters of walks and work with the performers on this.

**HTN.** I was looking for a connection between your works. I saw some similarities between *Pattern Matching* and *Familie Teczan*. They are a traditional Turkish family but they are practising American culture and in *Pattern Matching* you have the traditional carpets with a basketball court on them.

**NA.** It is about hybrid forms; we are all living this already. It is an appropriate construction.

*Familie Teczan* isn't originally a Turkish family; it is a German family with Turkish origin, at least the parents are. The children are all born and raised in Germany. In the video they are breakdancing, something which comes from a very male orien-

tated culture, they re-use this as their family culture. The family also sings in 4 different languages, I didn't ask them to sing in Turkish, Arabic German and English, all I said was 'sing a favourite song of yours'.

A colleague said *Traces* is linked to *Familie Teczan*. The question of identity and the new forms of self-chosen identities are very liberating.

The first video piece relating to *Traces* is *Voice Over* from 2006. *Voice Over* is the first video I shot in Berlin – The film unfolds in three distinct parts – a sort of prologue, followed by two alternating, equally weighted sequences. The fourteen-minutes video starts with a car ride through a social housing district: an anonymous hand sticks a harmonica out of the car, as we hear the soft whistle of the wind blowing through the instrument. Cut to a riverbank: rain is pouring down on a seemingly abandoned drum kit. Follows a night shot in a park: teen Turks sing folk ballads in the shady light of the camera lamp.

**AG.** We wondered why you did the singing parts of *Voice Over* at night.

**NA.** There was a very particular reason. I found these boys singing at Görlitzer Park in Kreuzberg. It was during winter at 5 o'clock in the afternoon. I asked them if I could film them and when I came back it was dark. They were singing the songs of my parents. I am from the second generation and they are from the

third - they reclaim these songs. For me it was quite surprising; I was brought up in Stuttgart which has a different kind of immigration model to that of Berlin. In Berlin it was at that time (2003) still quite segregated - here I felt more Turkish than I ever felt before. This changed to a certain amount ever since.

In the end I used a camera which captured the aesthetics of the night shot, which I liked. It focuses on these teenagers with the city in the background and it could be anywhere. I did the recording in 2003 and was not sure how to present it; whether I would even show it or if it was just for my parents.

I decided to break it up with something more like a *still life*. Therefore I filmed the drums in the rain and the harmonica played by the wind. That is how it became more of a city portrait; the instruments are linked to the people. It is the first time I used the concept of instruments played by nature, they are literally linked to the people you see in the video, they are singing the songs of their ancestors and these instruments are naturally played by the nature. This is the first video with a human embodiment in it; after that I only used the environment and the instruments themselves.

**HTN.** I saw your piece *Makramé* almost as a trick; it seems *oriental* but it is actually the atomic structure of iron. It is almost as if you are daring people to put you in a box.

**NA.** That is true but it was ac-

tually done unconsciously, although I wanted to use *oriental* connotations. Makramé originally came to Spain and Europe via the Arabic culture. In my youth in south Germany during the 80's all the German families had Makramé at home. I wanted to use a material that has strong male connotation like the wire cable to knot something that is female connotated. While knotting the wire cable it showed its own dynamic and character.

The knotted pattern was the profile of the wire itself, so the material was knotting a self-portrait.

**HTN.** I also thought this about *Significant Other*.

**NA.** A few years ago; still some people used to think I was a male artist because of my name. I liked the idea that I'm not producing particularly female works. Everyone thinks differently about it but for me it was liberating; I liked not being put in a box.

E.g. in the video *Nevin Aladag interviews Nevin Aladag*, in which a male actor is representing me, I was only adding my voice and he was lipsinking it.

In the preparation of the work I was sending questions to friends, to relatives and colleagues. I was reading the questions and the answers and soon it became clear that it is fragments of possible identities. It is an invitation to the Interviewee to speak through my voice and through the body of the actor in a symbiotic way.









# KULISSE HAUT

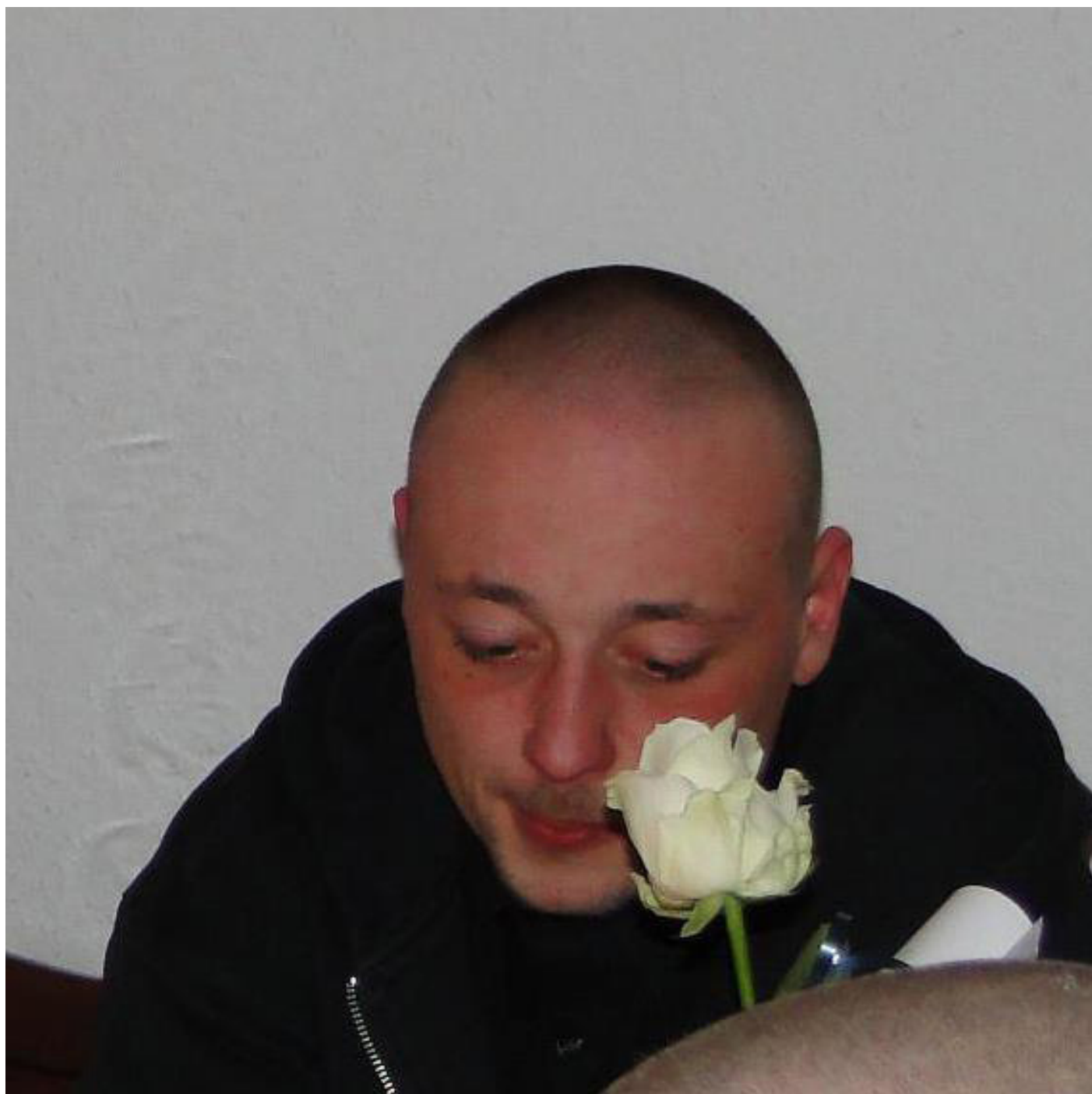
In meiner Intimsphäre fühle ich mich mir am nächsten und bin doch in ihr am wenigsten ich selbst. Eine künstliche, sozial erzeugte Grenze trennt die individualistische Welt der Selbstinszenierung, meine Show nach außen, von jener kollektiven Welt des Organischen, in der ich allen anderen gleiche und doch allein bin, ganz bei mir selbst. Meine Intimsphäre, das ist der biologische Prozess: Verdauung, Sex, Krankheit, Alter, Sterben. Ich habe mich als Einzelner herausgelöst aus einer amorphen organischen Masse mittels eines Körpers, der mich diese biologischen Prozesse als meine eigenen, ja als mein Innerstes empfinden lässt, obwohl sie überwiegend nicht nach meinem freien Willen statthaben. In meinem Körper stecke ich wie in einem fremdgesteuerten Raumschiff, wie in einem Mantel, der nur geliehen ist und nicht mir gehört. Sichtbare Grenze zwischen mir und den anderen ist die Haut meines Körpers. Alles, was die Hautgrenze von innen nach außen durchbricht, alles, was aus den Eingeweiden des Körpers stammt – Kot, Urin, Sperma, Blut, Eiter –, hat an jenem versteckten, geheimen Ort zu bleiben, der Intimsphäre heißt. Ich zeige nach außen nur die Hautoberfläche. Sie schützt mich und vermittelt den Eindruck von Ganzheit, von Undurchdringlichkeit ganz so, als gäbe es gar nichts dahinter. Sichtbare Oberfläche meines Körpers, ist die Haut jedoch demselben biologischen Prozess unterworfen wie dieser: Sie verändert sich, altert, ist nicht meine eigene. Deswegen unternehme ich allerlei kosmetische und modische Prozeduren, um sie zu bedecken, zu schmücken und zu verschönen. Meine körperliche Haut umgebe ich auf diese Weise schützend mit einer künstlichen zweiten, die ausschließlich meinem Willen gehorcht. Camouflage des Unreinen, Schmutzigen, Organischen und alles dessen, was an die Vergänglichkeit und Fragilität des Körpers gemahnt: Pickel, Falten, Deformationen. Sogar Wände stelle ich um mich herum auf, so dass sie ein Haus ergeben: meine dritte Haut. Mit aller Kraft verwandle ich die dunkle Höhle des Organischen dem Blick der anderen in eine ideale, entkörperlichte, helle und ewige Welt des Scheins, ja ich präsentiere mich dem Blick von außen im Kostüm eines Kapitäns meiner selbst, der ich ja keineswegs bin. Jenseits all der Kosmetik und Masken verstecke ich mein Intimes als meinen Makel, als meine Wunde, und wer von außen auf diese Wunde



starrt, wer sie gewaltsam bloßzulegen versucht, geht mir unter die Haut und droht mich in jenem Innersten, das mein Äußerstes ist, zu verletzen. Die Grenze zwischen mir und den anderen verschwindet jäh mit meinem Tod. Dann tritt die Verwesung ein. Mein Körper wird wieder langsam eins werden mit seinem Urgrund aus amorpher Fleischlichkeit. Was nach dem Tod von meinem Körper übrig bleiben wird, das ist seine Intimsphäre, aber nun ohne mich und gänzlich unansehnlich. Jetzt sind es zwangsläufig die anderen, die mein Intimstes vor fremden Blicken verbergen müssen, am besten tief unter der Erde. Der Anblick des geöffneten, verletzten oder toten menschlichen Körpers erzeugt Ekel, Übelkeit, Schwindel, Ohnmacht, Angst. Erst als Leiche berühre ich die anderen wirklich. Und ich berühre sie von innen. Die gemeinsame Fleischlichkeit bildet den Resonanzraum einer Berührung, die nicht von Haut zu Haut erfolgt, weil sie existentiell und organisch ist. Angesichts der Gewissheit, dass sich der individuelle Körper irgendwann auflösen und zurückfallen wird in die entgrenzende Anonymität des Biologischen, in den bewusstlosen Selbstbezug des organischen Empfindens, befällt uns die Ahnung einer depersonalisierenden und verdinglichenden Sogwirkung des Fleisches, herrührend aus einer Aura schutzloser Offenheit, die gleichermaßen hypnotisierend ist und beängstigt. Wir weisen eine solche Berührung aus einem Jenseits offenliegender, reiner Fleischlichkeit, diese Ichvanitasergriffenheit von innen, mit Grauen von uns. Man legt daher ein Tuch über Leichen, vermeidet die Veröffentlichung von Fotos schwerverletzter oder verstümelter Körper und hat um das Leiden, den Makel, die Krankheit, das Sterben, man hat um den potenziellen Leichnam, der jeder und jede von uns ist, eine Mauer gezogen, die das Kulissenwerk der Persönlichkeit, der menschlichen Haut streng von der Intimsphäre hinter den Kulissen trennt. Die Ahnung einer innerorganischen Kommunion mit den anderen wird unterdrückt und wird ersetzt durch die Sehnsucht nach intensiver äußerlicher Berührung. Wir wollen das fremde, uns äußerliche Fleisch ganz für uns haben, tief in das körperliche Gegenüber eindringen und die Hautgrenze niederreißen. Wir wollen hinter die Kulisse gelangen, unter die Haut, als Liebende oder mit Gewalt.

# **WHITE POWER**

Henrike Naumann



















17 04 2004



















# **SIMON NJAMI**

à propos de Xenopolis



**Ismael Ogando.** My later impression of Xenopolis, which is quite a strong title/statement for an exhibition in the context of the current *zeitgeist* made me wonder was is the core concept behind the development of this idea/exhibition.

**Simon Njami.** My theory, If one can call it theory, which is more of a feeling than a theory; is that everyone is a *stranger* in a city, and that, because of my upbringing, my personal story I always felt a *stranger* but not like villagers would complain. I was one in Switzerland, I never felt Swiss even if I'm holding a Swiss passport. My Family is from Cameroon, but I never really felt Cameroonian, I've never lived there then I've been the rest of my life in Paris but don't feel French, I feel Parisian.

If you look at the questions of nationalism, identity etcetera, I always thought that people were mistaken, they think they belong to something and that something belongs to them, I wanted to demonstrate it is like it is. I curated the group show so to develop an idea, a bit like a follow up with my previous exhibition *Wir Sind Alle Berliner*, even if that show was focusing on topics of colonial issues, that one was more about individuals and personal positions. Then so I asked *strangers* to tell me about their Berlin and so to take on the hypothesis that a city does not belong to

the state or whatever, it belongs to the people who is making it which in my opinion makes the beauty of big cities. For instance, if one go to New York, there no one will claim to be American, they claim to be New Yorkers because they don't like America, as if New York city was a state on its own. I think any city is a state on its own, it creates its own citizens. In the context of Nation and Borders, etcetera. I wanted to remind that whenever people determine they have an identity they are mistaking the term identity. *Identity* is not nationality or holding two passports, a passport does not make my identity, what makes my identity is my life and the different layers in which I've been forging who I am now. That is basically what the show is trying to remark or trying to tell people.

**IO.** Now that you mention New York, I got myself at first there this idea of a multicultural city, the city would amaze me by just going into the subway to face so many shades of skin colours, languages and nationalities. but then, I traced a pattern in the city's architecture on the way I was growing up, in the subway lines for instance, depending on how you move and where you ride to, the space will be coloured in gradients, from light shades of skin to darker shades and vice versa.



Partial installation view © Mathias Schormann, courtesy DB Kunsthalle



Laurence Bonvin: detail from the series "Blikkiesdorp" © 2009



**SN.** Well, that's because New York is big white spot.

**IO.** True, but then I also realised this patterns within the city's space, at first this marvellous sense of living in a multicultural city where everybody loves each other and then that strong sense of otherness and stigma attached to you depending of where you live, how you look like and so on.

**SN.** It is not because it is multicultural or that everybody loves each other, a city is like a puzzle. I have several friends in New York who speak about the city, I remember telling to friends once living in Central Park West that I was going down to Greenwich Village and they asked me what the hell was I going to do there? That's again, what for me *stranger* is, it is like I could be uptown and feel at home then go to Greenwich and do my business. That is why it is always important, at least for me, to have a kaleidoscopic point of view, because nothing is a whole when we talk about a city. For instance, we worked together for *Wir Sind Alle Berliner*, and that space do not reflected what Neukölln is, I've been to Kreuzberg and the Kreuzbergers would say they don't like Neukölln, people in Charlottenburg probably say same things about the rest of the city. So, one have to take into account the fact that a city is some sort

of Mille-feuille, do you know what is a Mille-feuille?

**IO.** A layer cake?

**SN.** Yes, but notice that in the cake those layers do not touch each other, they are isolated by a layer of cream. In order to have a whole picture of a city one must integrate all those layers. I cannot come here and describe Mitte and then say *this is Berlin*. That's why it is important to have all the *strangers* to have a take in Berlin, but it's not necessarily that they must become Germans, because even among themselves they should not concentrated in a specific location. But of course, if you look at their cultural complexions, some might have African background, Middle Eastern background etcetera. At the same time they are all strangers, even the Germans in the shows are strangers according to my definition of *stranger*.

**IO.** Those are the differences I would find between these two metropolis New York and Berlin, although there are a lot of analogies amidst the two cities. But for example, when it comes to distribute the hierarchy of the cake's layers, in the case of United States this can be spotted through racialized markers of separations, I mean one find in New York the Manhattan and Brooklyn scrambled, then the Bronx and Queens.

In Berlin one find areas like Marzahn, Hellersdorf, the peripheries. Although the population there in Berlin is mostly German, the context and history remain different in comparison to the United States which carries a long segregation period of a large group of *strangers*.

**SN.** I would say that Germany doesn't carry an official history of segregation. But, for instance; there is an island that is called La Union, it's a very interesting island because the historical accounts tell us there was no one by the time it was colonised. In that sense, everyone in the island is imported. In many ways America is the same... That's what in my opinion makes the differences between the new and the old world. While German sentiment is feeling strongly strengthened, American and Caribbean are mixed emotions of going somewhere else. Being a local here might allow you to feel one could exist in any other European city which cannot happen in the new world, which can have hierarchies, but the definition of *nation* America has is already an importation, it's a big lie and the lie in Europe is the same but much older so people tend to believe it is a truth.

A city compared to a village is always a place of movement, for whatever reasons. But there is a moment when it is decided that is convenient

for the people in Europe to have certain type of people to come to Berlin, because for instance, Paris is too expensive. And it reminds me back in the days when kids were coming to Berlin so they didn't have to do their military duties. Which gave certain balance to the feel of the city, meaning that all the kids that did not want to do the military service would come to Berlin and give to the city that specific vibe.

**IO.** Which is the *Geist* one can find still today in this city.

**SN.** Yes, because now who is coming to Berlin? the writers, the artists, etcetera etcetera. People don't come to Berlin to make money, if that's the case, people would go to Frankfurt or elsewhere. And so, what I call the *fabric* of the people in this city is what makes this city's *fabric*. And that fabric is holding and changing all the time.

**IO.** I'll take your metaphor of the *social fabric*, understanding it as a sort of technological fabric, like one of those garments that appear to be made out of soft satin-like threads and then when you touch it they give you that synthetic sandpaper sensation. That is how I personally perceive the city of Berlin is changing, which I also relate to the notion of claiming a city by territorial occupation but also cultural mimesis or appropriation by mainly upper

class white youth, that seeks in Berlin the excitement and promises of the *City*, as in that song by Petula Clark *Downtown*; going downtown, a place of opportunities.

**SN.** Well, that is an illusion based in the notion of invisibility, one can disappear in a city. you can't disappear in a village where all your neighbours knows you, they saw you growing up, they know your parents and everybody knows everyone. In the city you can just disappear, because nobody knows anyone, everyone is rootless, that's why people can claim part of a city, people know there they are on the move, they landed in the city but then any day they have to pack and go. That is something intrinsic of cities, they are illusions.

**IO.** Going back to Xenopolis, I got struck by your concept of the city as a living organism. As a young artist living in Berlin I find hard to place myself, which is the reason why I am still here after years, but staring at social functions the same way one could interpret biological organisms. How could one re-interpret the city in this sense?

**SN.** The principle of the biological metaphor is very useful to understand certain points, if you look at the human being, it produces what it needs, its body is chemically producing what is needed.

Cities are a bit of the same thing, they produce their own energy and heal their own wounds. In a way or another a city finds its own solutions. But then you have two things for a city to exist; a city exists as such, as a concept and is moving. It is in this re-shaping that individuals become part of its chemical processes, a city can not evolve or move on its own as a concept, so there is always a dialogue between the individuals being made by the city and the people who is making the city.

**IO.** I guess then to understand this biological organism which is the city it is required to understand its biological processes and functions too... Metabolisation for instance, how does a city metabolism works and what is been metabolised?

**SN.** The togetherness, If you look at Paris for instance, we have there a Chinatown, those individuals are Parisians, but then it is stare as a city within a city. We also have an African city in Paris but the interesting part is that those micro-cities don't necessarily meet. There are always some *überstrangers* like myself who moves from Africatown to Chinatown and back again to my "claimed" part of the city. This is the illusion of Pluriculturalism, which brings us back to the metaphor of the layer cake; some people have the illusion



they are *multicultury* because they live around a bunch of *others*, but are those cultures actually meeting? Because in my opinion, what makes a real melting pot is social junction. There then one finds out that people is colourblind not because they are racists or not, it is just because in the context of a city, social interactions are integrated through homogenesis, I mean; the rich is living in the city, the poor too. Only what we are doing can allows us to cross those borders.

**IO.** In that direction lets look at this organism through a wider lens, and lets speak of organisms composed of several cities. Europe for instance, as an organism it is expected to have mechanism of defence as any biological entity has against foreign agents that terminologically can be described as *potential pathological agents*. I had this reading after visiting Xenopolis of individuals in the cities far from the marxist idea of *social symbiosis*, in the current state of affairs in the West, I read from the curatorial work and your concept for the exhibition, that we, people in the West function in an ambivalent behaviour, be it antibodies and parasites simultaneously.

**SN.** Understand our body as a metaphor, it rejects things. The city as a biological living organism reacts in the same way. And if we think of Europe

to this level, we should think of Europe as a city with several neighbourhoods. Again; in Europe you have the rich and the poor, and how northern is and how southern is, and of course then there is England which is a world in its own, which can just not merge with any other...

**IO.** Yes, it is a special case... **SN.** With no doubt, it is the *quintessence of strangeness*... But anyways, at the same time, if one look at London, the city appears to be more multicultural than a place like Paris just because of the crossovers... I am saying; Europe is a fiction as the *city* is a fiction and a fiction can only work when everyone agrees with it.

**IO.** Finally, in the case of the Mille-feuille metaphor, who you consider might be the chef?

**SN.** Since these cakes are multi-layered, there are several people living with the illusion of becoming the chefs of the cake, but they can't. That's why in so-called democratic places, they are changing chef periodically.





# LA VOZ DE TODOS LOS DIOSES

Paulo Burgos



















































El **Arete Guasú**, ancestral fiesta de carnaval celebrada por la comunidad indígena de Santa Teresita, corazón del Chaco paraguayo, se modifica a través de los años producto de un mundo cada vez más intercomunicado. Pese a ello, el ritual que convoca a las familias de la región no pierde su esencia: Máscaras, ritual de iniciación a la vida adulta, danzas circulares, música infinita, muertos que celebran la vida con los que aún quedan en este mundo, reivindicación indígena... todo eso junto en tres días anuales de Celebración. Estas fotos intentan decodificar “el tiempo verdadero” y ayudan a una aproximación por este conmovedor evento realizado en el medio del desierto.





# TWO GUYS

Le Cam Romain



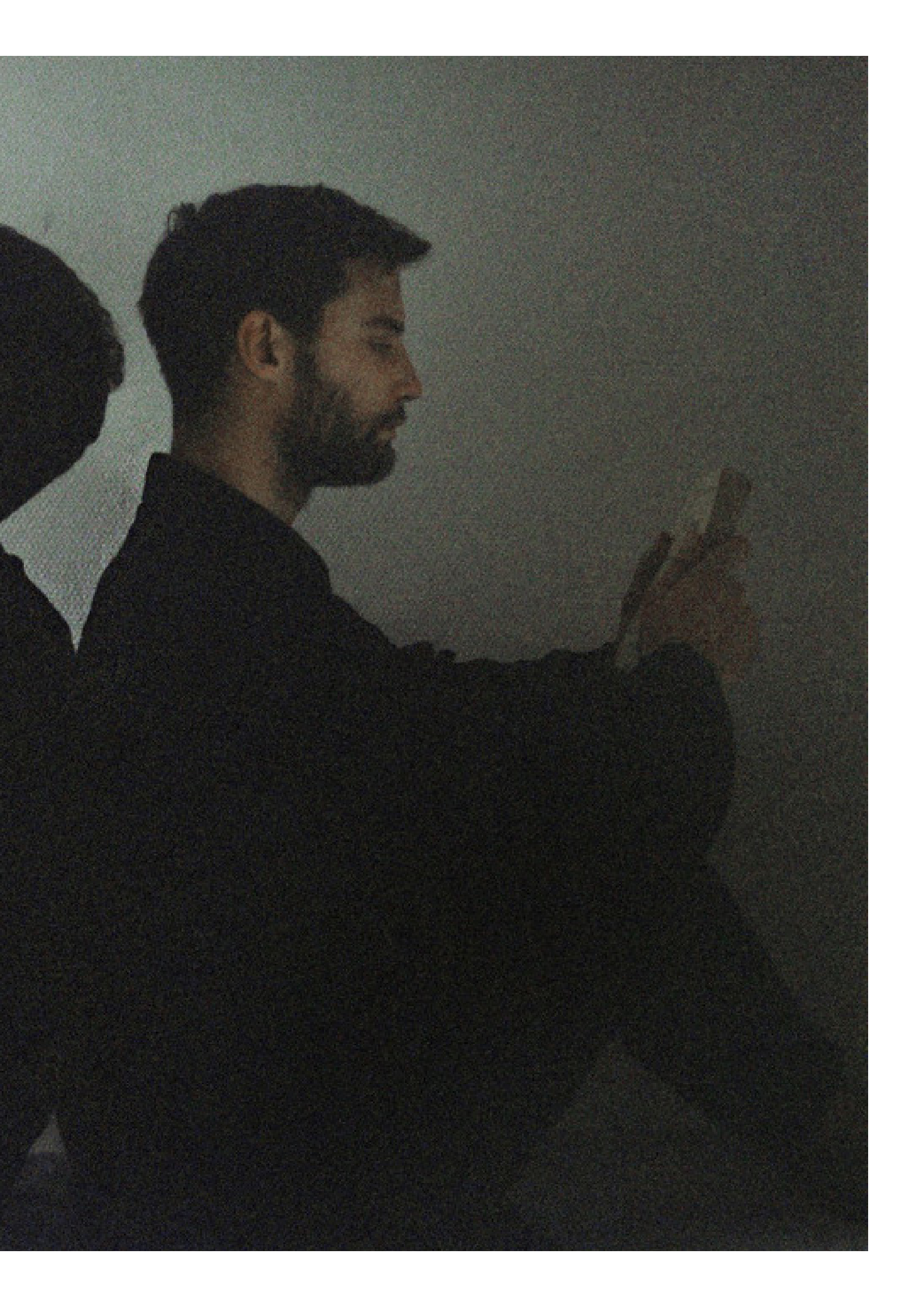






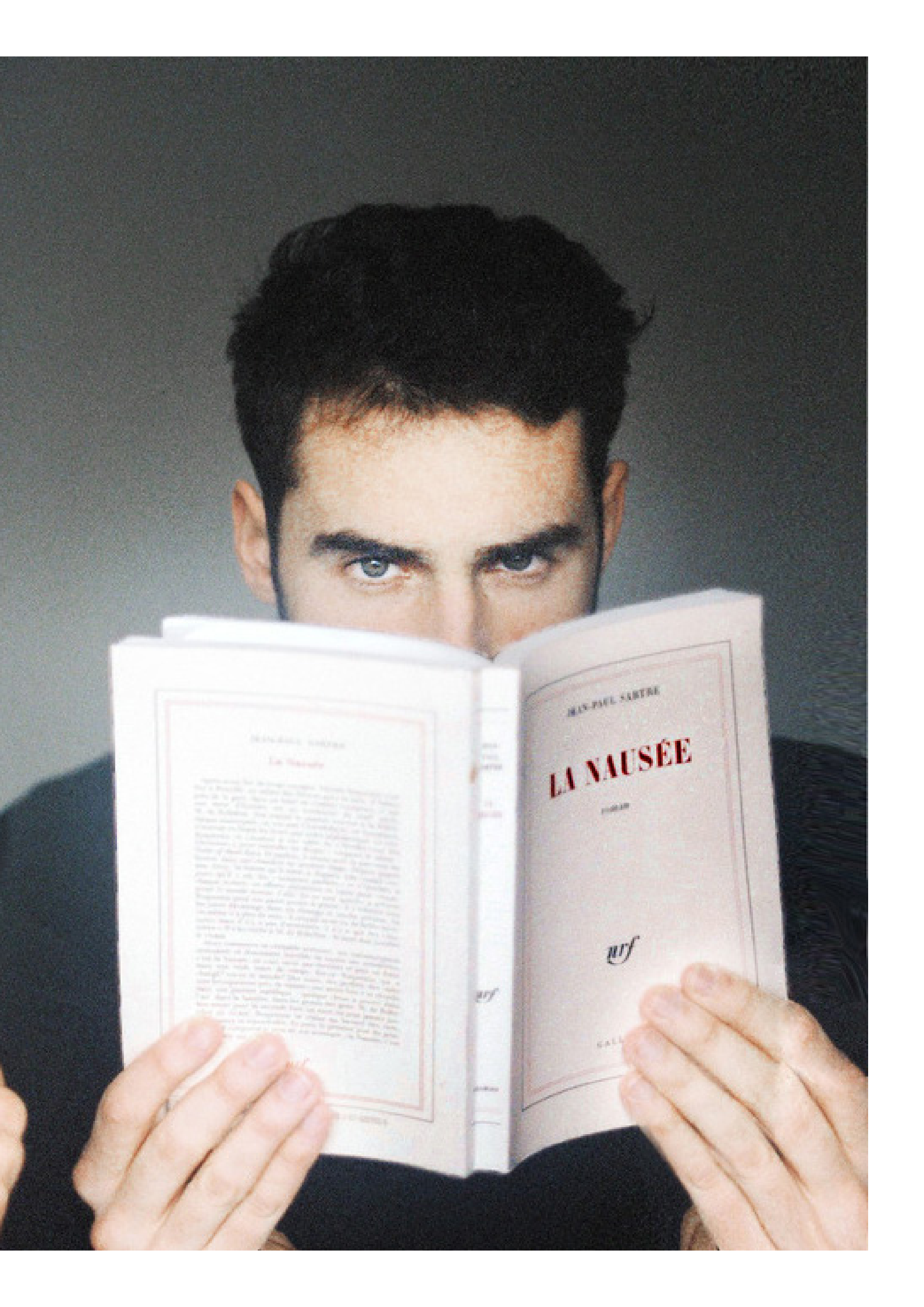
























# **DISTORTION THROUGH MOTION**

Luis Alberto Rodriguez































**DOES SOCIETY  
WANT YOU TO  
BE ALONE?**







A new relationship last summer had me reflecting on my past relationships. What went wrong and would I repeat these mistakes? Was the problem lying within myself or could I lay the blame elsewhere? Living in a big city I am often told of the difficulties of pursuing a relationship when there are so many other temptations available to distract you. Work, social life, or keeping up friendships. As if despite your best intentions, outside forces will eventually wear you down.

Your adult relationships can be negatively influenced before you are even sexually mature. Childhood experiences form the basis of your psyche and personality. For example, witnessing troubles in your own parent's relationship during childhood can create a fear of intimacy later in life - the reluctance to commit in adult relationships in an attempt to avoid the same misery. This fear

of intimacy causes a person to, sometimes unknowingly, sabotage or avoid romantic relationships due to fear of eventual rejection. If your romantic prospects are not yet damaged by your childhood, there is still plenty of room for modern society to interfere. Developments in technology have greatly changed the way people communicate, interact with one another and establish relationships. Online interaction has replaced human interaction. Communication through social media and online dating has made it much easier and quicker to meet potential new partners, and just as easy to discard them. Getting to know someone on a deeper level can be a casualty of the desire to quickly accumulate other potential new partners, forgoing quality for quantity.

Shifting attitudes towards the importance of relationships in society also play a role. Women are no longer



regarded as unlovable spinsters should they choose to live alone. It is not unusual that relationships come second to pursuing education and a successful career. Being financially independent and living alone in a place you own yourself is seen as an aspirational goal. People are encouraged to divorce rather than stay in unhappy situations.

In particular, attitudes towards the institution of marriage have changed immensely. In an increasingly liberal minded society, settling down at a young age rather than "making the most" of your single years, carries a stigma amongst usually tolerant people. A friend aged in his mid twenties secretly got married at the city hall following a whirlwind romance. My first thought was that his new wife was probably pregnant. Others assumed she needed a visa. In the end they announced they had simply

gotten married for no other reason than that they were in love and had chosen not to invite anybody. Probably due to the those assumptions.

My summer romance didn't survive through to Fall. Was it doomed from the start as I am a child of divorce? Were we never really connected because it was easier to learn about each other from Facebook than from speaking to each other? Or perhaps as an independent adult I didn't want myself to be defined or judged by being in a relationship. Ultimately, rather than a self fulfilling prophecy relationships are just two, flawed, human beings trying to make it work. Sometimes it doesn't, or like my friend who married in secret (who is two years later still happily married), if you drown out all the noise, it might just one day work.























# THE COUPLES PROJECT

Abdi Osman









A man with dark hair and a beard is smiling, wearing a white shirt with thin black vertical stripes. He has a small tattoo on his left shoulder. The background is a light-colored fabric with large, vibrant pink and red floral patterns. The text is overlaid on the lower half of the image.

# **SANTO DOMINGO ART BIENNIAL CONTROVERSIES**

A conversation with Jay Yapor





LE  
SY



At the edge of time, there is a place in the caribbean sea, sedimented by colonial legacies which is in complete denial of its own constitution. It started in 2011 when for the XXVI Santo Domingo Visual Art Biennale that the polemic around the content and form of the works selected and prized began, for the XXVII biennale it turned into scandal. This year, for the XXVIII Santo Domingo Visual Art Biennale, the internal committee at the Modern Art Museum of Santo Domingo, foresaw what could be a risk for the statu quo. Due to the current political climate in Dominican Republic, the governamental agenda aiming at perpetuating a softcore dictatorship has structured means of control over every public sector in order to dismantle subversive oppositional agencies. Re-counting the events concerning the xenophobic propaganda driven by a nationalistic faux-pas that resolved in the lynching of three Haitian nationals as a consequence of populist strategic initiative of former president of the Dominican Republic Dr. Leonel Fernandez Reyna. The half an island, now remains a narco-state, and the independent art sector is struggling as well as their artist against censorship. Then, artists as citizens too carry the responsibility of acting out against the cultural demands of silence imposed. The measures installed by the MAM committee resulted in the unconstitutional re-structure of the biennale's participation and eligibility condition bases. For that we connected with artist Jay Yafort, artists selected for the XXVII edition of the biennale who until today still pays the price of for making what is considered by Dominican art authorities a scandalous and obscene piece of art.

**Ismael Ogando.** What happened to you at the XXVII Visual Art Biennale of Santo Domingo?

**Jay Yafort.** I decided to present the piece MIX and had a premonition, I knew that the piece was going to generate shock, but did not expected that to affect me as a person or as an artist. It's been two years already and people still come to me with the piece, asking why did I do that, with certain shade in their tone. My intention with that series of photographs was to make a criticism to Dominican society attitude towards sex, I criticised how we stand in front of such a topic by presenting a visually provocative essay that I don't personally consider is obscene.

As I was target of the censorship campaign all I can now think is of leaving this country, but unfortunately it is not that easy for me and to find a place in the art scene of Dominican Republic is nearly impossible if you do not belong to the elite, or get along with them.

**IO.** Did you had a mention or an award inside the biennale?

**JY.** No, I did not have anything, I was just selected, I think to be mentioned or awarded inside this museum's condition is impossible with the kind of approach I have to art. But I did have some visibility due to the scandal, as you were one of the only people that seriously analysed my work, together



with Jorge Nieto's piece, which was also target of censorship by the museum.

I had several international representative and curators interested in my opinion about the piece due to the scandal generated, but behind their interest there was a more lurid intention in me far from my professional work as an artist, so i had to move carefully. Of course, nothing worked out at the end.

**IO.** What do you mean with lurid intentions?

**JY.** They just wanted to sleep with me. It was convenient though that I had that publicity, since I work also as an escort, as a matter of facts my work is the result of my practice as sexual worker. With the buzz around my pieces, the rate of my escorting raised, but concerning my art practice there was not significant development at all. But I do want to have my work to be taken serious, I want to travel and show my work in other latitudes. The only space where I can create and present is in the context of the biennale, but the bases of participation for the coming edition are just ridiculous. Clearly they want to avoid to have my work there again.

**IO.** Do you consider such measures taken by the museum's committee as some sort of discrimination action?

**JY.** Yes, I do think it was an act of discrimination. The circle of art in Dominican Republic is very closed, and exclusive. I am due to this unable to find spaces to exhibit, or people to write and analyse my work, unless I kiss some white Dominican asses.

I have to make a living out of my own body performance as sex worker, it is a reality that does not ashamed me, and I want to speak in my work as an artist of this realities, but it is impossible to be taken serious by your own sponsors here, reason I just want to depart. I have the feeling outside this country I can find space, the dilemma is on how will I get out of here.

The double-standard of people in power or lets say, ruling the art scene does not allow them to publicly celebrate something as natural as their own sexuality. It is a deep problem in the Dominican Republic's culture, where a minority is ruling the big majority who is asleep in a lie. This ruling minority imposes criteria and ways of seen and thinking about our own bodies and desires as individuals, want to place sentiments of shame over our skins and bodies, how we move, how we love and how we enjoy, it is all controlled by this minority and I am just sick of this.















# CORNERED





# ENERGIES

Mustafa Saeed









































A painting of a person's face and hands in a pool of water. The face is partially submerged, with only the nose, mouth, and chin visible. The hands are also in the water, one near the face and the other further down. The water is depicted with various shades of blue and green, suggesting movement and depth. The overall style is expressive and somewhat somber.

**THERE'S  
A DOUBLE  
STANDARD  
ON SHOWING  
CORPSES IN  
THE MEDIA**







# Have you ever seen the corpse of a “*white person*” in the news?

Ayesha Siddiqi, editor in chief of The New Inquiry asked a few days ago on Twitter: “*Seriously asking,*” she followed up, “*have you ever seen news media circulate images of a ‘white’ person’s corpse?*”

Specifically, on the day Siddiqi asked, we did not. We did not see the bodies of two journalists horrifically gunned down in Virginia by a deranged ex-colleague on camera. Social media sites and major news outlets were swift to ban videos and images of their deaths.

I’ve thought for some days on her question. I’ve asked friends and colleagues. And while my rudimentary survey is by no means conclusive, it struck me that, no, I have not seen a “*white corpse*” in the news in recent memory. Not, perhaps since 20 years ago, when an image of a fire fighter carrying a dying little caucasian girl from the rubble of the Oklahoma City Bombing became iconic.

Images of “*white people*” close to death have alone caused much controversy — consider the tragic, spectacular photo ***Falling Man***, captured in frame leaping from the North Tower on 9/11. There was also much censure directed at the New York Daily News for publishing a front page picture of Alison Parker, the anchor murdered on air, as she looked into a firing gun. The New York Post was condemned for showing James Foley with the Islamic State executioner’s knife pressing to his throat.

There are good, ethical reasons that me-

dia producers, media sharers and media consumers urge these images be excised from our visual landscapes. But lately we often are exposed to images of African Americans and Middle Easterns victims, for equally but differently ethical reasons.

Forcing people to look at deadly, police violence — such as the videos showing police gun down ***Tamir Rice***, or ***Walter Scott***, or choke ***Eric Garner*** to death — has underpinned and buoyed the power of Black Lives Matter. Equally, images of dead ***Gazan children*** helped importantly disrupt Israeli narratives about its 2014 assault on Gaza avoiding civilian casualty. Photographed rows of Syrian children killed by airstrikes made visceral the cost of the Syrian civil war. What does it mean, then, that to report on horrors perpetrated against certain bodies we show death, and against other bodies, we hide it?

The question seems particularly worth addressing this week as social media platforms and news outlets seem split on the ethics of publishing images of refugee children from Syria and Iraq drowned in the Mediterranean Sea, as well as the bodies of 71 smuggled refugees found dead in a truck abandoned on an Austrian motorway. On Wednesday, multiple news outlets published a most terrible image of a ***drowned Syrian toddler***, one of 12 refugees who died including his five-year-old brother, attempting to reach the Greece. His body washed up



on the beach of the Turkish coastal town, Bodrum. These images, first captured by the Turkish News Agency DHA, now feature on the front page of a number of major British newspapers, from tabloid to broadsheet.

Some argue that the censoring of such pictures would cover up the horror of the crisis. Tabloids use the same humanitarian argument as a pretext to make profit off gruesome spectacles.

The counter-argument asserts that the images are no more than death porn, devoid of political or ethical force. None of these arguments can stand alone without a reckoning with the way visual culture already treats the representation of dead victims of different societal and racial identities.

One of the most prevalent arguments against publishing Islamic State execution videos, or the Virginia on-air shooting, is that the killers in these cases want the visuals to spread as **propaganda**, and we should thus resist aiding this effort. But we would see many more caucasian corpses in the news media if censorship was limited to subverting terror propaganda efforts. And we don't. Similarly, Western media platforms don't only ban images of these corpses—we don't see footage of the Islamic State executing, say 600 Yazidis in Northern Iraq.

Corpses are in general considered unpublishable, largely on the ostensible grounds of overly graphic content. But it remains true that we often see Muslims and Africans, and almost never caucasian corpses presented in the media.

There's a comfortable symmetry to the idea that there is value in hiding the corpses murderers want to parade, and displaying the corpses the murderers are keen to have hidden. We hide what the Islamic State wants to publicize, but we make public what, say, U.S. police departments would rather brush under the

carpet. And more often than not, African Americans and Latin-American bodies are the victims of atrocity that our prevailing power structures would rather keep hidden. Since African American male teens are 20 times more likely to be killed by police than their caucasian peers in the U.S., it stands to reason that there are simply more African American corpses to show in the struggle against police violence; that's why it's an anti-racist fight. But the fact that there are significantly less caucasian victims still does not account for the absence, and the specific efforts to remove, these corpses from the news media.

It comes down, I believe, to a question of **humanization**. It has been explicitly cited as a reason for removing footage of executions and dead bodies that such media dehumanizes. The memories of lived lives are reduced to corpses; and corpses in turn reduced to spectacles—the going commodity of late capitalism, as Guy Debord famously argued. Little wonder that it is often family members of the deceased who urge against the sharing of execution videos. *"That's not how life should be,"* wrote one of Foley's relatives, asking that the public not watch the journalist's beheading. And, certainly, that's not how life should be. But this tells us something about our current state of social justice, too. That it is only by virtue of looking at the deaths, the corpses, and the becoming-corpses of African Americans lives like Scott Walker, Mike Brown, Tamir Rice, that the media even thought to ask about their lived lives at all.

The suggestion is not that caucasian corpses dehumanize their preceding lives when displayed, while the same is not true of African and Latin or even Asian American bodies. I think the same assumptions about primarily focusing on dead bodies applies across the board. It's a longstanding and valid criticism of











media commodification of the grotesque and tragic. It's not limited to caucasian bodies. Public outrage followed poet Kenneth Goldsmith's edited recital of Mike Brown's autopsy report, and an art exhibit depicting Brown's corpse with a mannequin under a sheet in a Chicago gallery. Anger arose precisely because Brown's body was treated as a pure commodity alienated from the victim's humanity. The only thing perhaps more offensive than those artistic offerings is the truth they speak to — Brown's body was already **media spectacle**, and already dehumanized.

The difference between the artists' use of this horrible truth, compared to the **Black Lives Matter** response, was that the art doubled down on the spectacle as a commodity, while the activism engaged in what NYU professor of media culture and communication Nicholas Mirzoeff calls "*persistent looking*."

By this, Mirzoeff highlights and celebrates the political act of making visible murders like that of Brown and Garner specifically in order to push the public gaze beyond the spectacle, into addressing both structural violence and the humanity of the individual whose life has been extinguished. But it had the opposite effect...

It's of note that Mirzoeff has written about the political value of publishing images of deceased refugees seeking safety in Europe. Specifically, he wrote about the photographs of drowned children posted to Facebook by photographer Khaled Barakeh. The images were banned, then restored, by Facebook's secretive and offshore-operated obscenity filters. Notably, it took mainstream media publishing photographs of the same atrocity to have merit deemed beyond atrocity. Mirzoeff's point about the relevance of such images stands regardless: "*We have to keep looking, to remember the people that died. And to begin to imagine what*

*we can do politically with the mass of digital images,*" he wrote.

We are in a grim state of affairs if it takes horrifying spectacle to prompt political intervention. It's not clear that removing morbid imagery is more ethical than displaying it—both are bereft ethical acts if we don't look persistently, with a view to act against the structures that produce the horror these images depict. Images of corpses may be dehumanizing, but nothing so dehumanizing as a global power structure that provoke thousands to die at sea as they seek little more than survival.

I'm aware that race is complicated when talking about the victims of the refugee crisis, insofar as a number of refugees are very light-skinned, and could read as "*white*." For the purposes of this piece, and by my lights more generally, to talk of "*whiteness*" is to talk of white privilege. We may be looking at pale corpses, but these are not the bodies of humans accorded "*white privilege*;" a body can be very light-skinned and far from "*white*." Race after all is a **social construct**, not a series of skin color swatches.

In the case of Black Lives Matter's deployment of "*persistent looking*," it is striking that it has taken the visualization of African American death to shine the focus of mainstream media and politics on the value of their life.

Any reactionary demand that we assert "*white lives matter*" ignores the fact that it took no less than the presentation of the African American dead, at the hands of U.S. law enforcement, to gain popular recognition of the statement that "*black lives matter*." It is as terrible as it is true: the aperture poor African American lives, to be humanized in the media is that it has been ended.

In another important comment from Siddiqi on this issue, she asked, "*when does documentation and archive continue dehumanization? when does bearing*



*witness become spectacle?*” She specifically highlighted how images of lynchings used to be sold as postcards.

Documentation and archive, especially of corpses, always risks continued dehumanization. The desire that caucasian lives be removed from such corporeal archiving highlights this point. I would argue that in our current media culture, bearing witness always becomes spectacle. Whether this spectacle is simply click fodder, or taken up as grounds for political resistance is up to us. There is a deplorable history of oppressive power structures using the spectacle of killing to affirm their sovereign control, including the Islamic State’s taped executions, public lynching in the South, and all medieval public torture.

But there is also a history of resistance forces using this same visual horror as fuel for revolt. One of the reasons that public torture fell out of favor with “modern” Western states was that the sight of convicts’ bodies would at times elicit enough public sympathy such that it would cause riots. **Black Lives Matter** has demanded that the public must look at footage of police summarily turning African American lives into corpses, and the *persistent looking* has indeed bolstered crucial unrest.

Sympathy is important, and often finds its most avid participants around untimely death. If there were no political potency in pathos, then Joseph Goebbels would not have written against the Jews in 1941 for “send[ing] out their pitiable.” It was a comment that Glenn Greenwald saw eerily echoed in the words of Israeli Prime Minister **Benjamin Netanyahu** last year when he said that Hamas was trying to garner international support by showing Gaza’s “telegenic dead” Palestinians—namely, some of the **448 children killed** in nine months of Israeli attacks on occupied territory in 2014, according to the UN. As I wrote at the time, Netanyahu’s

comment was an inadvertent admission that Israeli fire was producing the sort of dead bodies that make news—children, above all.

If we look at the dark histories of what could be called the “telegenic dead”, or “pitiable” dead, we are looking at a visual history of oppression. These are annals of dehumanization. We might recall the famous photographs taken by U.S. military personnel of the emaciated, exterminated Jewish bodies piled on top of each other in the camps at Buchenwald, Bergen-Belsen, Mauthausen and more. Necessarily, this sort of visual representation tells a story of dehumanization in its most extreme form. When it is plausibly ethical to display the dead, it is because those lives have been reduced to a quite terrible and impossible position. They are subjects given voice only once they are reduced to corpses. Little wonder white bodies in recent decades tend to be exempt from inclusion in these visual narratives.



A photograph of a prison interior. In the foreground, several strands of barbed wire are visible, some in sharp focus and others blurred. The background shows a long, brightly lit hallway with a high ceiling, industrial lighting fixtures, and a wooden door. The overall atmosphere is stark and institutional.

# **JUST ANOTHER UNEXPECTED GUEST**

Sascha Mikloweit & Adriana Galuppo





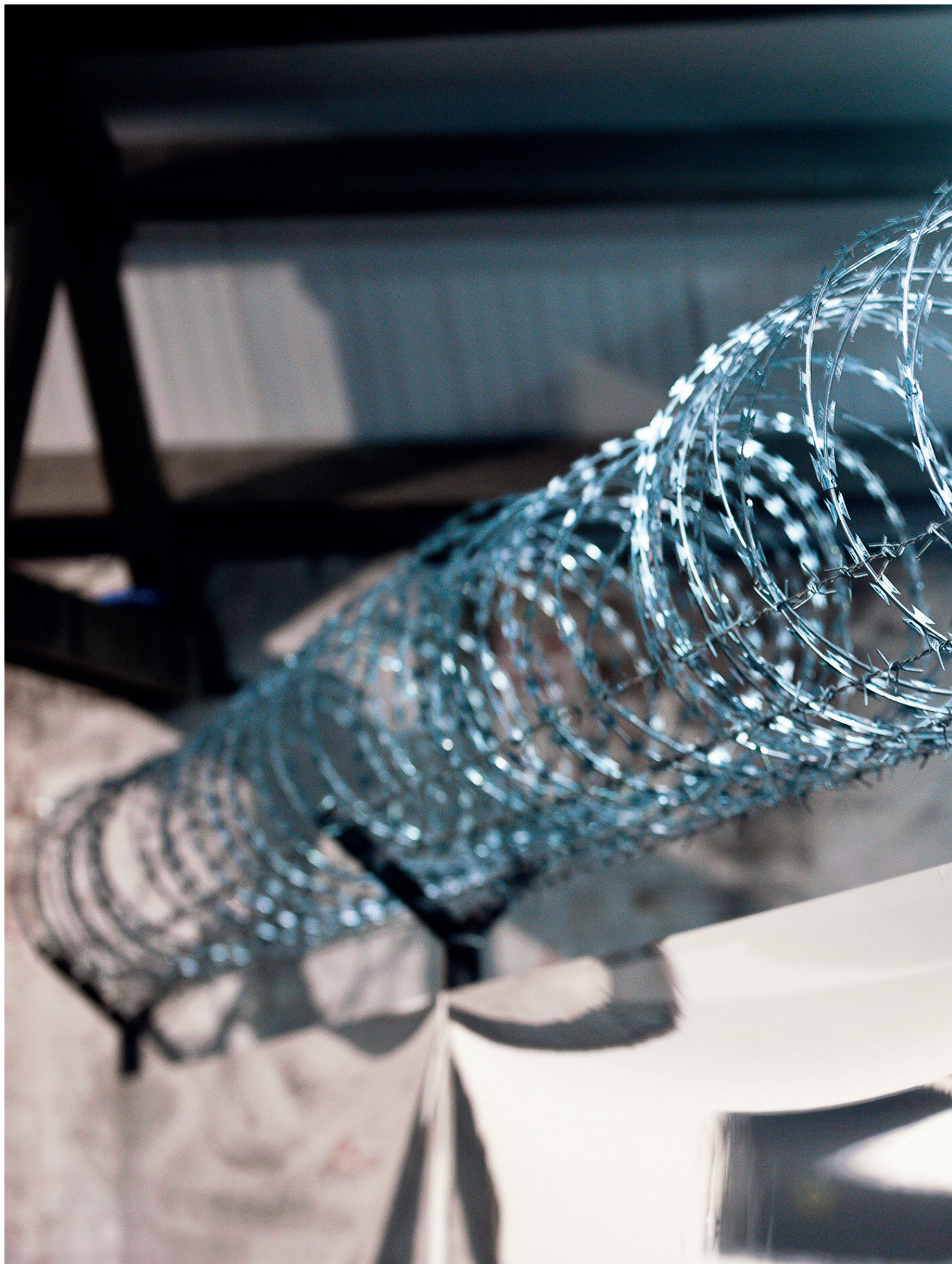




















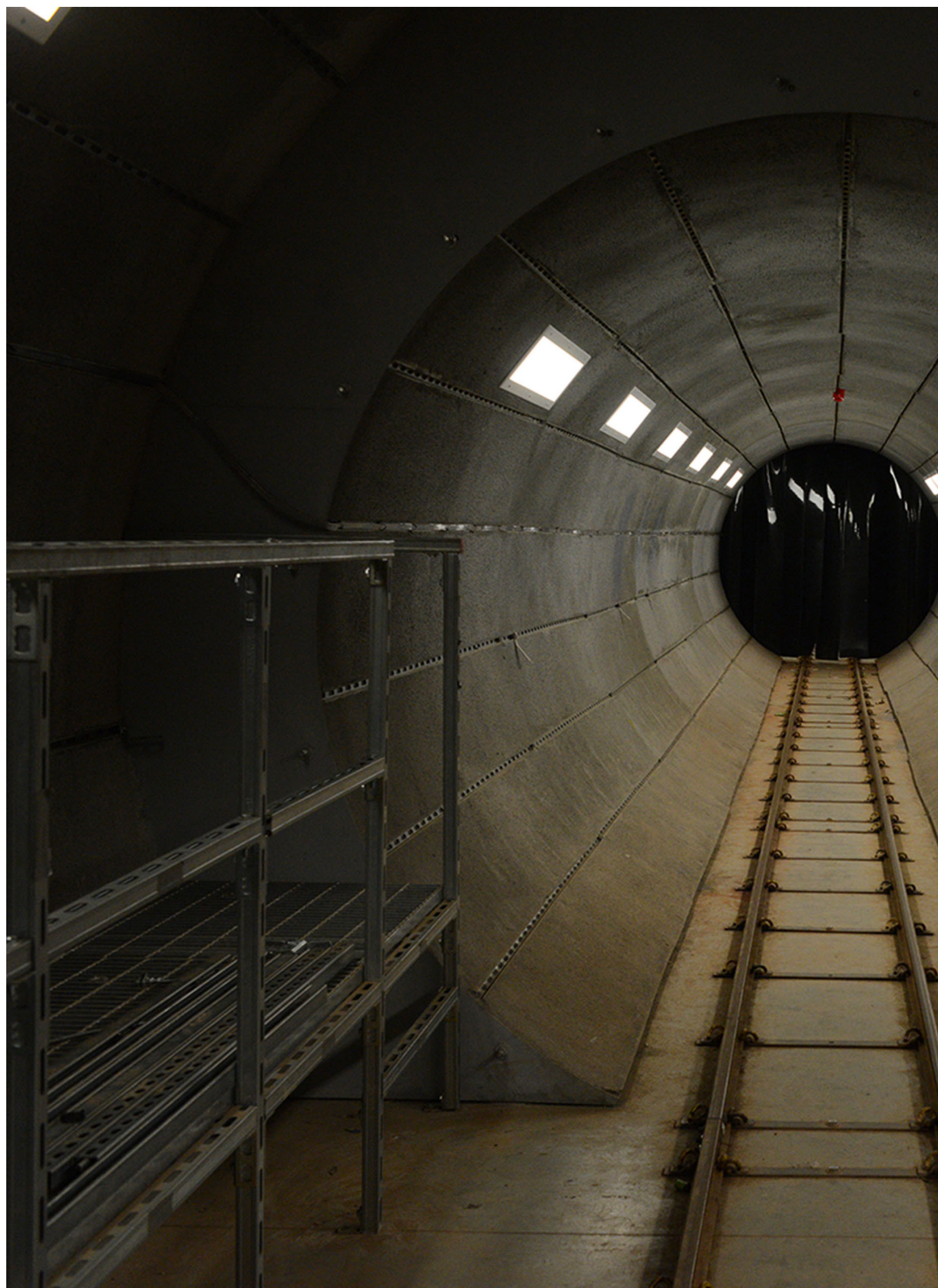
# INNOCENT PASSAGES

Jan Lemitz























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DRAFT — new

Further deploying the allegory of Tel Aviv as the 'city built on sand' and its association with Bauhaus architecture, this project seeks to unravel the largely unchallenged myth of an urban environment built on a landscape without past. Intrinsicly integrated into the founding narrative of the State of Israel, the bubble of Tel Aviv aims at being closer to global hubs than to the reality of its economic, political surroundings. In the mean time it reflects an economy shaped on free market principles with next to no public involvement and close links to security logistics and infrastructure maintaining military rule and occupation.

































# MY LITTLE





# AIRPORT



**My Little Airport** is a Hong Kong music group formed by Nicole and Ah P in 2001 and debuted in 2004. Their songs are really catchy and poppy with the lyrics about daily life. Sometimes, the song is written in English or French, such as “j’ai peur”. Because of it, many people share the same feeling on it, for examples “Who Invented Going to Work” for workers; “Graduation Equals Jobless” for undergraduate students and “Divide Stephen Lam's 300,000 Salary” for Hong Kong citizen. Recently, My little Airport is becoming well-known in Hong Kong, working with different artists or singers. Last year, their song “Beautiful New Hong Kong” was nominated for Original Theme Songs of Hong Kong Film Awards.

MyLittleAirport是香港的二人組合，由Nichole和阿P組成，於2001年成立，並於2004年出道。歌曲以清新夢幻為主；歌詞則以日常生活為題，歌詞中亦常融入英文和法文，例如《j’ ai peur》。由於歌曲大膽、貼近生活，如打工仔的心聲：《邊一個發明了返工》，畢業生的吶喊：《畢業變成失業》；甚至是扣緊香港時事的諷刺：《瓜分林瑞麟三十萬薪金》等，所以許多市民皆對其歌曲產生共鳴。近年My Little Airport的知名度逐漸提高，開始與不同藝人、歌手合作。去年，他們更憑著《美麗新香港》一曲走上了香港金像獎的舞台。

**Suki Choy:** 當年INDIE音樂在香港尚未流行，也未得到主流認識，為甚麼會選擇創作這類型音樂？

**P:** 因為MLA當時不是一隊BAND，沒有結他手鼓手等，所以只能用一些最簡單的樂器來創作。本來不想用電腦軟件來扮出結他和鼓，但既然沒有樂手、被迫要用假的聲音，就想做到最假，就像音樂玩具那一種。而且也想保持低成本製作，所以初期主要創作這類型音樂。

**Nicole:**我以前只聽八、九十年代的歌。在大學時認識了阿P才開始接觸Indie Music這類音樂。

**Suki:** 從前的歌詞都是而日常生活為主，例如愛情或學生，為甚麼近年的歌詞開始與政治相關？

**P:**應該是在09年反高鐵運動那段時間開始寫政治話題。當時就像八十後開始覺醒的年代，而自己就像置身其中一樣，每天在

**Suki Choy:** Why did you choose to play indie music as it was not popular when you started this project?

**P:** My little airport is not a band, we do not have a guitarist and a drummer. I could only use the simplest instruments to create songs. Also, I would rather to create the sounds with toys more than to create guitar and drum sounds if I use computer software. Mostly want to lower the costs, therefor at the beginning the songs were focused on this kind of music.

**Nicole:** Before I met Ah P in university, I only listened to 80's and 90's American music. After meeting Ah P, I just knew indie music and started to listen to it.

**Suki:** In the past, your lyrics were all about daily life things, such as love or study, but why do you choose to write about some politics theme recently?

**P:** I started to write politic theme since 2009. There was a construction of the Express Rail Link issue. At that time, there were many news about it even on Facebook. It seemed you were a part of it. It







Facebook見到這類新聞，所以覺得許多人開始發洩對社會的不滿。隨著時勢，所以當時寫的歌會特別明顯和抗爭相關。

Suki: 那麼你們會否認為當一件藝術品或者音樂扯上政治時，會惹來很多回應或爭議？

Nicole: 首先我想知甚麼叫政治。就像阿P一直所寫的一樣，這些話題都是圍繞著我們，都是發生於生活當中。如果要分開說這些是「政治」也可，但對我來說這些事都是我們的生活。所以，我不會用這種角度，如「反社會」去看待這些事。所以，我第一時間反問「甚麼是政治」。

P: 我記得當時也有人說，做音樂還做音樂，不要拉到政治上。但亦有些人覺得當一首歌的內容與政治相關的話會更加貼近生活。

Suki: 既然問到政治，那你們對去年的雨傘運動有甚麼想法？

P: 覺得是等了很久，終於發生了，但最後沒有結果。一回想起，就會有種不想再參與社運活動的感覺，例如六四。

Nicole: 我從兩個角度去看。第一，我會覺得整件事是人類進化的必經階段，結果也是正常的，就像一隻小鳥在樹上綜觀整件事。但當回到地面的角度來看，我看見的是香港人改變了許多。我覺得有幾件事可以表達人性的真面目，例如打麻將、飢餓和社運。飢餓時，會見到人性最真的一面，就像在戰場上。我很慶幸自己置身其中，因為我本來不太關心政黨或者政府官員的想法或政策，我最關心我朋友，或者在這片土地成長的年輕人。我看到他們的出發點十分純粹，而我自然的想法就是希望能保護他們。

marked the political awakening of Hong Kong's post-80's. This made people try to share their unsatisfied feelings and thoughts to the government. Because of it, the songs would be much stand out to people which is related to politics.

Suki: So, do you think that there would become more feedbacks or even controversy if the song or artwork is related to politics issue?

Nicole: I would like to know what politics is at first. Just like what Ah P does, he keeps writing lyrics from his daily life. This all happens in our life. It is fine if someone want to separate it. But as for me, this issue is also a part of our daily life, it is a content. I would not use this angle to look at it. Therefore if you ask me this questions, I would re-ask you "What do you think is politics?".

P: I remember there were some people saying; *music is music, don't mix up with politics...* when these songs came out. But some people would also think that these songs are more related to our daily life.

Suki: Since we talked about politics, how do you two felt about the **Umbrella Movement**?

P: It felt like it has been waiting for so long to happen. But finally, there was no result. Sometimes when you recall it, it feels you are unwilling to participate in some activist movement, such as Candlelight Vigil for **June 4 Massacre**.

Nicole: I have 2 angles to look at it. Firstly, I think this must happen in the revolution of people. Even the result is really normal. But this is just a big picture of it. When you look deep down into it, I notice that many Hong Kong people has been changed. I think there are few things that can reflect the true face of humanity, such as **Mahjong, hunger strike** and activist





Suki: 在雨傘運動後期，可以看到有不同藝術作品或音樂人出現。你們對這事又有甚麼看法？會否因為這件事，反映出香港的藝術空間不足？

Nicole: 我覺得藝術空間是自創的，並不是提供了空間，就會有藝術。如果你很喜歡某一件事，自然會盡力完成。例如阿P很喜歡音樂，十多歲就開始創造音樂，就算沒有很好的音響或軟件，都會用已有的設備去達成想做的事。而雨傘運動當中的LENNON WALL就是一個很好的藝術空間，因為是直接表達感想，而且由自己去創造。這件事很好。

P: 和想像相比，雨傘後的作品出奇地少。都已經經歷了這麼大的事，但是卻很少人用藝術來表達。

Suki: 那麼香港政府對藝術發展的支持是否不夠？仍有很多進步的空間？

Nichole: 如果要說好或不好，首先要和其他城市做比較，才能判斷。但這就帶出另一個問題，香港人的藝術意識好不好。

P: 政府常常推動一些政策，如活化工廈，來發展藝術。但是，這些政策往往只是推高了的租金，多於推動藝術發展。所以，有時候不需要由政府推動，某些地區的藝術也可以發展得很好。

movements of these times. One feel you were in the war, so that the true face of humanity would become more obvious. I am so glad I could be one of it at that time. It is not about the parties or governor's thoughts or policies. It is just about my friends or even the young people who are growing up in this city. They just want to make the things better, and because of it, I just want to protect them, naturally.

Suki: During the **Umbrella Movement**, we can see that there are lots of artworks and performances. How do you two think of it? Or say, does it implied that the art space in Hong Kong is not sufficient?

Nicole: I think the space for art is self-made. Art would not create itself even if the space is provided. If you are really into somethings, you would try hard to make it happen. Just like Ah P, he likes music a lot, so he creates music since he was very young. Although there was no good music instrument or softwares available, he could use the music equipment which he already had to make his dream come true. During the Umbrella Movement, I think the space art took over was really good, As in Lennon Wall. People shared their thoughts as to create their art space.

P: I think the artworks about Umbrella Movement are surprisingly few. It is because this is a big issue to Hong Kong, but there were just few people to present Umbrella Movement through art.

Suki: So, is the art support from Hong Kong's government not enough? Or say, are there enough spaces improved by Hong Kong government?

Nicole: We cannot judge if it is good since we need to have a comparison with other cities. But there is another, such as whether Hong Kong people has enough sense or knowledge about art.

P: HKSAR always execute some policies,



Nicole: 因為他們沒有足夠的意識或層次去推動藝術發展，所以結果弄巧成拙。

Suki: 你們覺得西九文化區如何？這項計畫推行多年，但仍未有實質的成果。

Nicole: 其實我不太清楚，但我想他們都會不斷從失敗中學習。

P: 推動藝術不是只限於某個地區，而是整個城市。但首先要解決土地問題，解決了土地問題，很多藝術事情都能做到。其實有很多人可以進行藝術創作，但都因為負擔不起租金而不能實行。如果政策只想在某地方推動藝術，是不可行的。

Suki: 最後你們對香港將來的藝術發展有甚麼感想或展望？

Nicole: 其實香港有很多藝術活動，從最本土的社區藝術到最商業的都有。所以香港的發展能比一般地方跳得快，由它自己發展下去，做好自己就可以了。如果政府有興趣發展藝術或尋找策劃的智囊團和意見，我也樂意介紹一些人給他們認識。

P: 叫他們不要推動或者策劃太多就可以。

such as “Old industrial buildings revitalization”, it raises the rent rather than improve the art development. Sometimes, the art development is good in the society without any support from government.

Nicole: This is because they do not have enough knowledge to do it, and so, the result always turns like that.

Suki: Then, how do you both look at West Kowloon Cultural District, for instance? Since it has been developed for quite a long time, and there is still no obvious results.

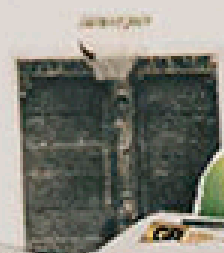
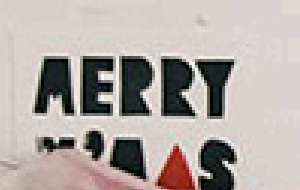
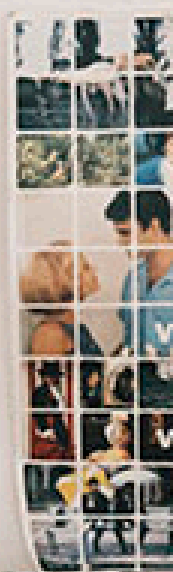
Nicole: Actually I do not feel familiar to it. I think they will learn from failure.

P: Art development cannot be only in a district, it should be the whole city. However, they should first solve the problem of land ownership first, because there are lots of people who want to create art, but due to the high rent rates, they cannot afford to execute their goal. So if the government only improve or develop art in one district, this is not going to work.

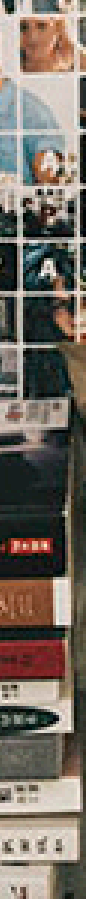
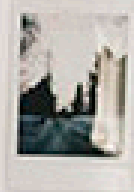
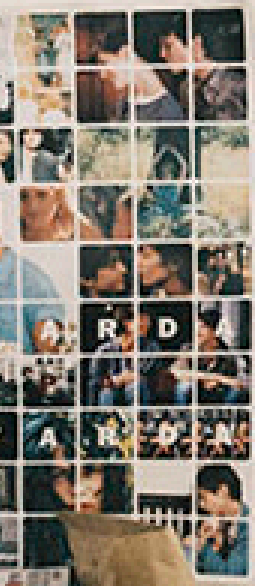
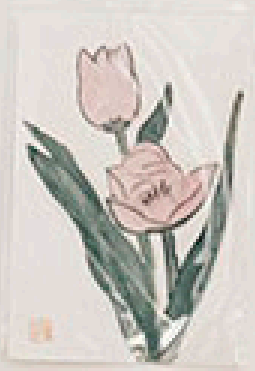
Suki: Lastly, how do you think of the art development future in Hong Kong?

Nicole: Actually there are lots of art in Hong Kong. From urban art, like local or society art to the most commercial art, all of them can be found in Hong Kong. That's why the materials in Hong Kong is rapidly increased. So I would prefer that art develops itself organically in Hong Kong. We just do our own best. If the government would like to find someone who can provide advice or policy to art, I am willing to introduce some people to them.

P: But please, tell them do not “execute” or “improve” too much on art.







# **WORKING BODIES**

**The Situation(s)  
of Lianain Films'  
Documentaries**



School children, their parents, and their teachers in Hong Kong. Lawyers, death row inmates, families, and the courts in Singapore. Clothing manufacturers, workers, and corporate fashion retailers in Southern China. Filmmakers, the state, and the people in North Korea. Female blind cricketers, families, and the search for sponsors in Nepal. Umbrella protestors—students and academics—challenging each other and confronting Beijing. East Timorese villagers addressing questions of truth and reconciliation, present selves recognizing and regarding past actions. Internally displaced children, the man raising them, and the unexploded landmines of Cambodia. These are some of the groups and topics featured in Lianain's films centered on struggle, issues of social justice, and the entanglement of work. These are some of the people and institutions involved in complex and complicated relationships—variably sympathetic, empathetic, antagonistic, apathetic, cooperative, and combative—articulated through their films, documents very often centered on questions of action, activism, and the ambivalent products and affects of embodied labor.

Lianain films (<http://www.lianain-films.com/>) is an independent Singapore-based film company headed by Lynn Lee and James Leong. (Lianain means “story teller” in Tetum, the language of East Timor, and comes from their experience in Timor-Leste filming *Passabe* (2005)—their first documentary—which featured village elders preserving the oral history of their village and community.) Lee does the bulk of the scriptwriting and Leong most of the camera work. The two have been making films for more than a decade and have produced seven independent documentaries, thirty television documentaries (for various AlJazeera

programs), and one feature film—*Camera* (2014), a science-fiction/thriller concerned with surveillance, obsession, and gentrification, which I discuss at length in “Becoming Camera to Record Everything” at [foreigninfluence.com](http://foreigninfluence.com) (<http://foreigninfluence.com/2014/08/25/becoming-camera-to-record-everything/>). Their films have won or been nominated for a number of awards and recognitions, including a Sundance Institute Documentary Grant, two Chinese Documentary Festival Best Film prizes, a Freedom Film Festival top honor, two Human Rights Press Award First prizes, a Puchon Project award, and various other humanitarian prizes.

What holds Lee and Leong's films together is a depiction of individuals in dynamic relations with others and with larger institutions. As they work through collaborative filmmaking practices, they also work at depicting the complex relations founding social collaboration. They highlight two aspects of these social relations, especially, eventually showing how they intersect. First, they magnify certain dynamics at work in authority and hierarchy: they focus on citizens, police, bosses, employees, bureaucrats, elites, and politicians and the institutions through which they interrelate. In doing so, they depict institutions that bind people to and separate them from their own governments—highlighting how different regimes (official, semi-official, and unofficial) work to survey and articulate the social relations through which they collaborate and cooperate. Second, through their depictions of the work of migrant laborers, clandestine or temporary employees, activists, civic representatives, professionals and academics, and security, industry, and state officials, they trace the intricate webs of responsibility that enmesh each actor along the way. While

their images of the regimes delineate the hierarchical organization of social interaction, their depictions of the temporally and logistically dynamic arrangements of the people involved in them problematize simplistic understandings of social participation and culpability. Protestors may challenge governments for more equitable representation but not all agree on the terms of the protest. Inspectors may call for safer labor conditions but not want companies to close shops or displace workers. Witnesses may testify to the violent and horrific history of a community but not want to tear it apart. In the end, both these paths are marked by their renderings of the bodies of the actors ensnared in the relations themselves. Hands, feet, eyes, mouths, gaits, gestures, sobs, smiles, grins, looks of pain or frustration, cheers and cries of elation or resolution fill these films about human beings living in this world.

A certain concern for social justice dominates Lee and Leong's films. The two are committed filmmakers who focus on smaller stories of individual lives—most often outside the mainstream (“off the beaten track” as one interviewer puts it)—and take care, in the ethical sense, of their subjects. They express a personal relationship with the people they interview and film, a personal relationship that reflects the ethos of their working arrangements built on trust, recognition, and respect. Yet, this ethos does not devolve into a univocal or monological relation between filmmakers and subjects. These are neither dogmatic nor bombastic films. Neither, though, are they sentimental outsider views filled with pathos. Indeed, the filmmakers are too engaged to turn toward such rhetoric. Rather, these are films that work to engage critically with questions of entangled responsibility, identitarian tensions, socio-cul-

tural intricacies, and the arrangements of storytelling precisely because they return to the subject and image of embodied labor and of the images of their subjects' bodies at labor. The complications of work complicate the situations these films document in a neo-liberal world.

Work is complex business and Li-anain's films open to such complexities attentive to the material and immaterial aspects of embodied labor. Work is skill, craft, endeavor, and reward. Yet, it is also tedium, boredom, risk, and exhaustion. It is mental and physical, manual and intellectual. It is always of a double structure, producing either a material commodity or a relational affect. Sometimes, it might be argued, some labor oscillates between the two, producing both—always engaging specific power dynamics and ethical encounters. Here, in these films, we are asked to consider how (contemporary) filmmaking itself produces a material object, how it is affective or not, and how the object of its somatic and psychological labor itself morphs to be productive—socially, culturally, ideologically. Focusing on the social labor of filmmaking, then, our relation to work appears dialectical in these films as the rights of workers and the right to work sometimes conflict. And the rights of different workers conflict as well. Both the regimes of labor and the dynamics of participation are always in play in these movements between the performativity of labor and the labor of performativity. In the end, the films often approach a synthesis, even if they never quite arrive at one, where the right to work is founded on workers' rights and the rights of different groups are conceived of along horizontal rather than hierarchical lines—from situation to situation within these complex creative networks.

For example, in *Denim Blues* (2015) the filmmakers spend a year investigating



the production of blue jeans and discover the ongoing practice of using sandblasting techniques to “age” the denim. Done right, says one health and safety expert in the film, sandblasting could be a sustainable way to treat the material. However, the factories we see in the film are ill equipped and environmentally irresponsible; their practices put workers at risk of dangerous skin and respiratory conditions, and the major labels associated with these practices demand they stop as soon as the filmmakers contact them. Meanwhile, at one moment in the film, we meet the banana farmers who still raise their trees around the factory. The once agriculturally rich area is now flooded with polluted water, and the farmers talk of their skin irritations. The dialectics are clear but never resolved. The factories are closed and dangerous. The farms are open, and the farmers appear satisfied in their work. The farmers need the land to stay unpolluted, though, so the factories must improve their practices. The workers need the factories upgraded to meet their own health concerns as well. However, when the factories are told to stop sandblasting under the current conditions, they simply close the unit. We hear of a conversation with now displaced sandblasters saying they have to move on—they know of another place that is doing sandblasting—maybe they can find work there. The expert from earlier in the film has suggested a small financial adjustment might make this situation workable for everyone involved, but that concession never seems likely.

Many of their other films also overtly raise such tensions and dialectical possibilities around questions of work. China’s Race for Gold (2012) depicts the work of athletes to make the Olympic team and the aftermath—physically and psychologically—of this strain. The film

documents especially how the state encouraged so many athletes to sacrifice their bodies, minds, spirits, and potential labor for state recognition and then abandoned them afterwards. Storm in Subic Bay (2011) documents worker protests in a South Korean-run shipyard in the Philippines with shockingly high working injury, dismemberment, and death rates. Here, the focus is on solidarity and collective movement. In iProtest (2011), the focus is more contained as it follows one activist, Debby Chan, and records the physical and social risks she faces confronting global corporations while gathering evidence of Foxconn and Apple’s irresponsible labor practices. Small Fry, Big Catch (2011) investigates the working conditions of Bangladeshi shrimp farming. The industry employs 750,000 people who produce some 20,000 tons of shellfish each year. This cash economy changes workers’ lives and bodies in unexpected, and irredeemable ways. Similarly, The Human Trade (2009) is about the difficulties of Bangladeshi workers travelling overseas and remitting money to their families and towns back home. Again, the theme of investment in cash economies is explored in relation to the costs incurred: what the workers gain and what many of them lose. Less obviously about material labor and more at the nexus of material and immaterial, manual and psychological labor is the work explored in a number of other Lianain films: Tough Love: An Education (2011), Maestro’s Daughters (2010), Blind Cricket (2008), and Aik Ra’s Boys (2007). These four films focus on labor away from factories or strict employment hierarchies and, in the process, depict other social entanglements sometimes just as somatically and psychologically challenging, ideologically bound, and creatively inspiring. Highlighting the relational aspects of family,







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education, arts and artistry, gender, age, and physical dis/ability, these films articulate further the tensions and dialectics involved in the power dynamics and ethical encounters circulating around and through the networks of work.

Lee and Leong also engage with their concern for social justice issues and situations through a number of films dealing directly with recognized regimes and attendant political structures. Their first film, *Passage*, is the story of a border town between Timor-Leste and Indonesia. The town is scarred by its past as the site of paramilitary massacres during East Timor's fight to become an independent nation. Here, the political place and social position of storytellers and testimony become central to finding a way to engage with community tension and identity. How and why we tell stories matters very much to our collectivity. *Wukan: The Flame of Democracy* (2013) explores unlikely populist challenges to staid—and corrupt—political structures through the story of a 2011 uprising in a fishing village in southern China. Along the way of reporting on the direct challenges, the film also begins to address questions of what happens after an uprising, after the confrontation—when the difficult work of solidarity and governance begins again.

Focusing on Hong Kong, two other films also fit this connection between visible political struggle and story telling. *Muzzling the Messenger* (2015) asks after the state of the press since the city state returned to centralized control by Beijing in 1997. Hong Kong's world press transparency ratings were once the highest in Asia; since the turn of the century they have been steadily falling. For six intense months in 2014, central Hong Kong was the site of one of the most interesting and complex protests in Asia. *Hong Kong: Occupy Central* (2015) is a

three-part documentary of the “Umbrella Movement,” its working strategies and arrangements, its antagonisms and frustrations, and its overall attempt to alter the political landscape—to make Hong Kong politics under Beijing as transparent and openly democratic as possible. The reunion of Hong Kong with the People's Republic of China was officially touted as a move toward, “one country, two systems,” where the “special administrative district” would have allowances made for its differences—historical, social, economic—from the rest of the nation. Following a central-party decision to alter Hong Kong's election process—a reform seen by many as a restriction on electoral autonomy and transparency—two groups began to work to challenge the state apparatus. A group of academics and a group of students confronted the system from different directions, not always agreeing on practices nor demands. Overall, though, they held referendums, meetings, demonstrations, and, eventually, occupied the central business district of the city. The protests were noted locally and internationally for their nonviolent and environmentally aware tactics. They also became known as the “Yellow Umbrella Revolution” when, in response to police teargas, protestors stood their ground using their ubiquitous umbrellas as shields. While the immediate effects of the demonstrations remain uncertain, this documentary shows the complexities of working for change from within larger social structures as well as on the edges of those structures. The government agrees to meetings, but there seems little change in official positions. While most of the protests and reactions remain civil; the police do assault the student leader. How many counter protest are legitimate remains ambiguous. In the end, the film focuses on the difficulties of activist



work—the struggle, exhaustion, and uncertainty it often brings—and demonstrates well the material and immaterial labor of the art of negotiation.

Perhaps a small set of Lianain's productions bring many of these aspects of work together around questions of cinema and the material and immaterial labor of filmmaking. In several films, Lee and Leong address the work of making films and the negotiations involved in filming filmmakers. *Yi Yi—One on One* with Edward Yang (2011) is an intimate (autobiographical) document of Leong's time during the summer of 199 with the renowned Taiwanese filmmaker while he was shooting his final film, *Yi Yi*. Yang is a family friend and close friend of Leong's father, Leong Po-chih, himself an acclaimed filmmaker (*Jumping Ash*, Hong Kong 1941, *Ping Pong*). This film portrays some of the intersections between the personal and the aesthetic that constitutes the working world of filmmaking.

On a grander scale, two films—*Cinema of Dreams* (2011) and *The Great North Korean Picture Show* (2012)—address the work of making films and the negotiations involved in filming filmmakers, especially when access to their labor is overtly governed by state decree. In important ways, much of Lee and Leong's labor and concentration on labor appears throughout this film. Neither an apology nor an exposé, *The Great North Korean Picture Show* and the processes involved in producing it express the inquisitive, patient tack of much of Lee and Leong's most solicitous cinema. According to the film's website, *The Great North Korean Picture Show*, North Korea's film industry is a vital tool in the regime's vast propaganda machinery. Now, for the first time ever, foreign filmmakers have been allowed into the country's only film school—an elite institution

where young talents are trained to create works that will not only entertain, but help shape the psyche of an entire nation.

Kim Un Bom and Ri Yun Mi are two aspiring actors handpicked to become future movie stars. Idealistic and ambitious, they have huge dreams. Their lives are a reflection of how the best and brightest live in the world's most secretive state. Over at the North Korean Film Studio, Director Pyo Hang [North Korean's premiere filmmaker] is racing to complete the country's latest blockbuster, a period drama featuring a cast of hundreds. It's a highly stressful environment and Pyo has his work cut out—he must not only rally his cast and crew, he must deliver a masterpiece that will please his leaders.

<<http://www.thegreatnorthkoreanpictureshow.com/>>

This stress of the negotiations between the instituted structures and the relationships among individuals maneuvering within and through them cuts across this film, most particularly in the scenes featuring Pyo Hang's attempts to get soldiers, borrowed as "extras" from the army, to convincingly act like soldiers while on set for *The Hunter*, an epic about Sungun Day—the annual marking of the establishment of the "army-first" policies and present militarist dynasty in North Korea. In two scenes, in particular, Lianain's film focuses on the material and immaterial, productive and affective work it takes these actual soldiers to portray the militarism and enthusiasm expected of them, in the process, raising questions about filmic and militaristic performance overall.

In one scene, Pyo uses an acting trick, getting the "actors" to bend over and hold their breath so when they stand again they will look fierce for the camera. In another, the actors, identified as soldiers working as "extras" on loan from











the military, are performing as soldiers singing a nationalist dirge mourning the tragic events just before the rise to power of Kim Jong-il and the Songun revolutionary leadership. The camera cuts from Pyo shouting directions over a loudspeaker, to a man in tattered clothes pointing a hose over the soldiers to create the illusion of rain, to the soldiers awkwardly moving and singing. As they haltingly move through their steps, the camera cuts back to Pyo and the woman dressed in a bright red shirt and blue handkerchief behind him, who is demonstrating the rehearsed gestures for the actors to follow. While the film depicts the actors and the director of the epic, especially, as dedicated to the cause of the production, it also shows the emotional, psychological, and corporeal performances behind this dedication. Drawing out this oscillation between surveillance and performance—and the interdependency between the two—the film emphasizes—without ever making a point of it—the dynamics among regimes, hierarchies, collaboration, cooperation, and embodied labor.

Pyo explains the point of this film and his enthusiasm for his role in producing the film:

It's a 50th anniversary film and we have to make it well. What protects our people's freedom...and protects us from our painful history is a good leader. Showing how people and guns can protect our country gives me energy. I am very proud to be able to film this, so I feel good.

At that point, as he completes this patriotic statement, Pyo attempts to exit the documentary's frame, but the camera begins to follow him. Pyo stops, looks into the camera, and raises his hand slightly. He says, "Please stop filming me." We hear the nervous laughter of agreement off screen. Pyo hesitantly laughs back and turns to walk away again. It is easy

to believe in the obligation he feels here, the sincerity of his speech and of his request. The camera obliges him and cuts almost immediately. It is also easy to believe in the strategy of the situation, that Pyo wanted preserved this demonstrative moment of dedication to and collaboration with the dynasty. As well, though, it is also easy to believe Pyo at this moment is just a man tired at the end of a hard day's work. Regardless which scenario is true or not—or which combination or not—he trusted these filmmakers to do their duty toward him here.

In their statement regarding the film, Lee and Leong explain how they traveled to North Korea in 2008 after Aiki Ra's *Boys* was invited to the Pyongyang International Film Festival. There, they met filmmakers and performers from the national film studio and wanted to learn more about what they describe as a "film industry like no other."

The North Korean movie stars and directors we met spoke about serving their country and crafting messages that would glorify their leaders. They told us about their roles as creators of propaganda, and about their General, Kim Jong-il—genius of film, theatre and music.

We were intrigued and wanted to find out more. But we were not interested in shooting on the sly. We wanted access—proper access—that would allow us to interact with our subjects openly and candidly, over an extended period of time. We wanted to meet the people behind the propaganda, understand their motivations and get to know their personal stories.

It took us more than half a year to secure this access and when permission was finally granted, we were told we had to agree to a few rules. Some were not easy to swallow and we had to think hard about them. Should we say yes and risk



being accused of making a film that was less than objective, or decline and have the door close on us?

In the end, we decided to go for it. Over a year, we made four trips to Pyongyang. They were all logistically difficult to arrange. It was hard to know if a visit would be our last. Still, things got easier with time. Our subjects became less reserved, our guides, more flexible. We learnt that it was important to keep an open mind, to demonstrate that we respected our hosts and to let them show us, rather than to demand to be shown.

Some people have suggested that our subjects were merely putting on an act. Maybe they were told to be on their best behavior, but we hope that by being patient, by stepping back, and by being as unobtrusive as possible, we were able to capture moments when they were their genuine, unadulterated selves. What is the truth? What is real? All we can say is we opened a door, walked in, and observed. Did we succeed? The audience will just have to watch and decide.

Lee and Leong recognize these filmmakers as producers of propaganda. Yet, they also recognize them otherwise as well. What began as a covert curiosity changed into a desire for overt access and direct documentation of the policies and the people—the two aspects of social relations they trace through many of their films—the networks and the individuals situated by those networks. And, they begin by documenting their own documentation—the rules and regulations that articulated their position in the endeavor, their collaboration and cooperation in their exercise on the work of filmmaking. They express fear over jeopardized objectivity and authenticity. Then, they shift their perspective to consider other stakes in the project. Negotiation makes their own tack possible, allows for

their own patient and open approach to documentation. And in the end, their recognition turns from the others they filmed (or stopped filming when asked) to the others who will see their films. They hope they have depicted something given rather than taken; they hope it is a difference the audience can glean from the film they have made.

In the end, Lianain's films maintain this sense of hope and openness toward the different strategies others deploy. It is a very specific hope and an agreement with their subjects and audiences to recognize and respect the work of documenting embodied labor and the embodied labor of documenting work. Questions of navigating and negotiating institutions and regimes of surveillance and articulation combine with concerns over social justice and the productive and affective work of filmmaking to highlight humans in entangled in structures that situate them physically, psychologically, socially, culturally in local circumstances within a neo-liberal global society. Currently, Lee and Leong are at work on two investigative documentaries they've described as "sensitive." I know they mean these two current projects might offend or upset folks and so need to be kept quiet to protect those involved. But, I also know these films, if like the others I have seen over the years, will appreciate and attend to the feelings and situations of everyone involved. I look forward to seeing them.

# WITCHES FROM GAMBAGA

Eric Gyamfi





















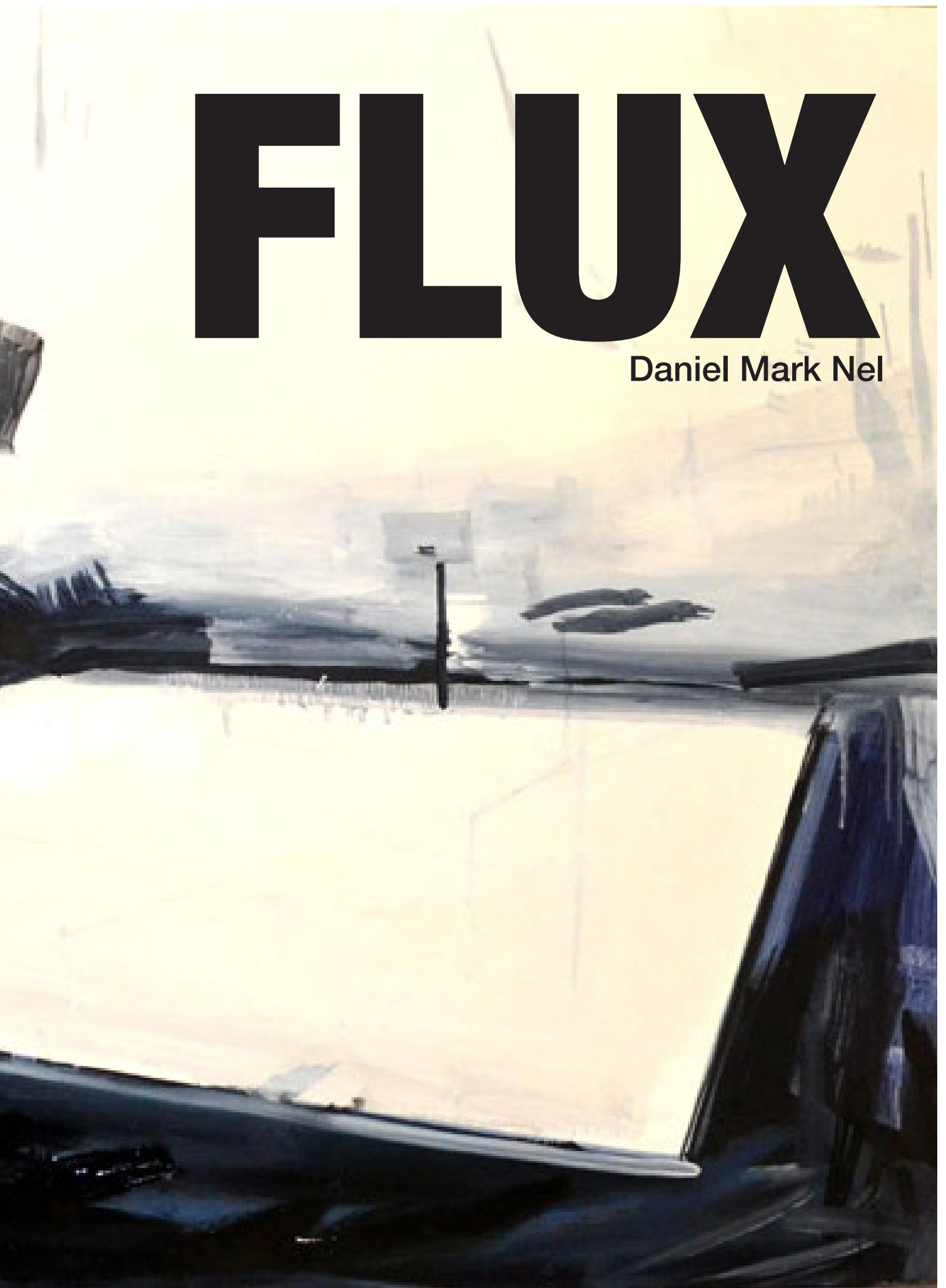






# FLUX

Daniel Mark Nel







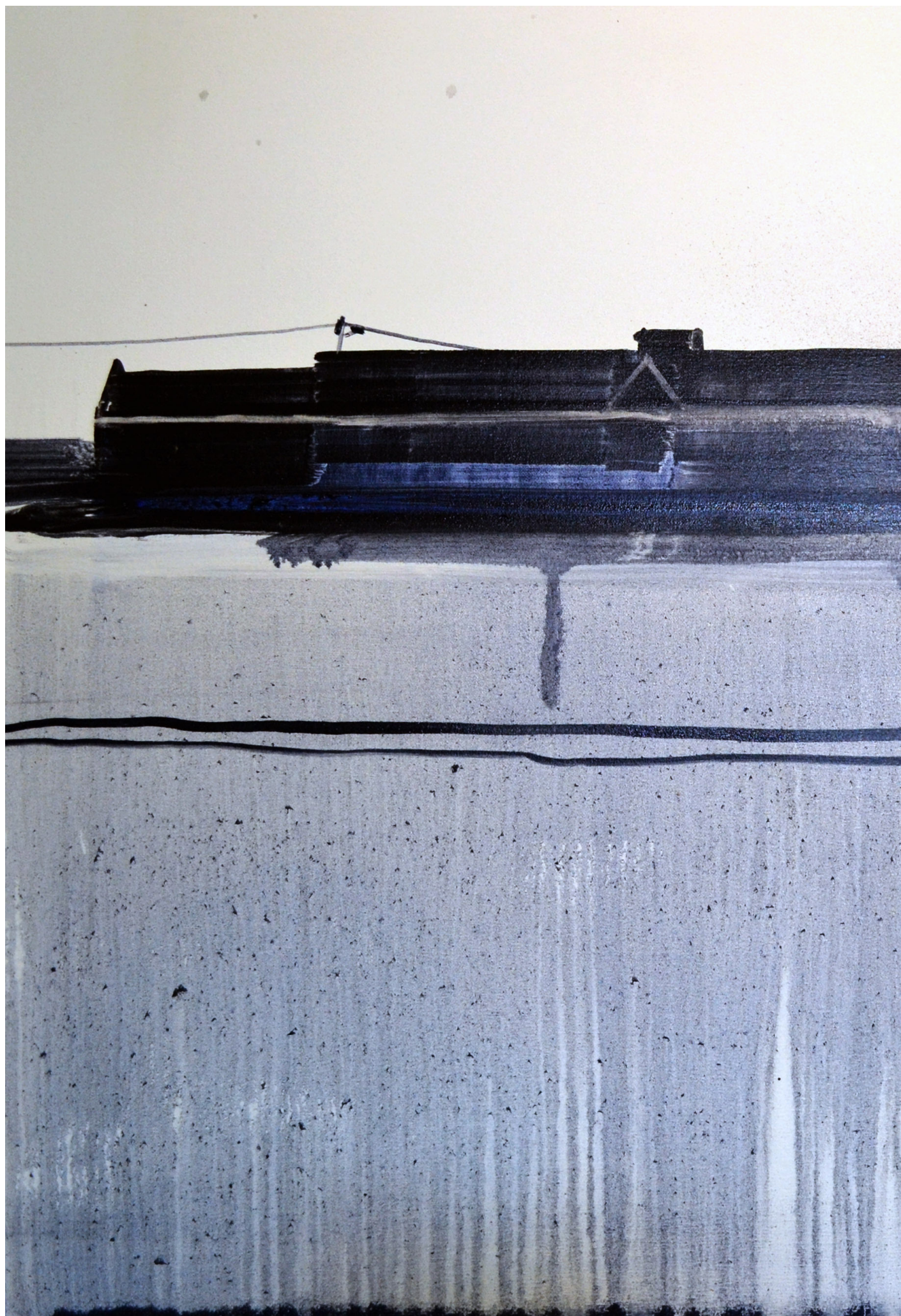




































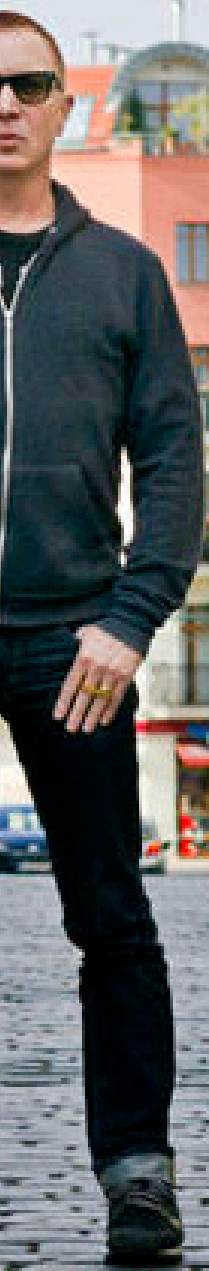
# HEARTLE YOUTH

A conversation with Bruce LaBruce





# SS



**Ismael Ogando.** I came across your name in a compilation of movies that an ex boyfriend gave me as for my birthday before we broke up. Among Tony Richardson's *Mademoiselle*, Jack Clayton's *The Innocents* and a bunch of Almodovar's earlier films that by the time I have already watched, was Bruce LaBruce's *Raspberry Reich*. It caught my attention, your name, I thought you were a transgender filmmaker. I would like to know what honours your stage name?

**BLB.** My stage name is a corruption (literally) of my birth name, which plays on the name Bruce as one of the most famous gay monikers in Can-merica. Bruce has long been considered a code name for a homosexual, so doubling it up and putting a "La" between it just raises the stakes! Also, putting "La" in front of anything suggests grand and diva-ish behaviour, of which I have often been accused.

**IO.** I'll confess I was quite shocked at the time I saw your *Raspberry Reich*, I mean; *Marriage Is Nothing More Than Licensed Prostitution*, totally changed my mind. This effort on destroying supposed gay schemes is obviously one of the key elements on reading

your statement. What made you turn bitter against this "discount kit / prices' catalog" that society offers to male gay disguised as "equal rights / tolerance" life style?

**BLB.** Well, you just expressed it pretty well! It boggles my mind that gays feel like they have to act in heteronormative ways and buy into conservative institutions that have long since been rejected by feminists and other salient beings. The new gay conservatism now attempts to distance itself from its more unruly and disobedient children in order to achieve its assimilationist agenda. It's the same thing with postfeminism: women thinking they have to act like aggressive heterosexual male assholes to achieve some kind of "progress" and compete within a corrupt system instead of forging new directions and ideas based on their own female attributes and characteristics that might actually challenge and change the madness of the new world order. It's a flawed strategy.

**IO.** Your films are charged with that acid taste of irony, Do you think your work is somehow a parody?

**BLB.** A parody of what? It reminds me of when the actor



Eric Braeden has a cameo on the Mary Tyler Moore show as a poison-pen television critic, and when he meets the anchorman, Ted Baxter, he asks drily, "Of whom is this man doing a parody?" I think what's going on in my movies is a bit more complex than mere parody, and it may have something to do with the idea of "camp", a subject that I just delivered a lecture on at the Berlin-based conference "Camp/Anti-Camp". It has to do with a deep sympathy and identification with flawed and sometimes ridiculous characters that somehow also exists simultaneously with an impulse to make fun of them and mock them. It's about not only being unafraid to recognise your own flaws and idiosyncrasies, but having the chutzpah to project them into the world in the form of glamour! Glamour, guts, and glory!

**IO.** I oddly found humour on your flicks, some situations seem to call for it, but I not sure. If you have to fit in a tag, which would be the category where they could place your work on a video store?

**BLB.** Oh gee, you ask the tough ones! Hmm, how about "Sophisticated Trash"? "Intellectual Camp"? "Funny, But Then Again Not So Funny"? "Flawed and Flawless"? Here's a good one, borrowed from a critic writing about my movie Skin Flick: "Too Weird To Be Porn; Too Relentlessly Full of Sex to be Any-

thing Else"? Or, from another critic, "Pornographic Brecht"? How about (from another critic) "Despite Its Cutting Edge Posturing, Disappointingly Dull"? Oh wait, I guess that's getting away from the point. Let's go with "Gorn".

**IO.** What is your position about those "Gay Districts" over America and Europe's most cosmopolitan cities?

**BLB.** I've always had a bit of an aversion to gay ghettos, whether it be the "Gay Village" in Toronto or Chelsea in New York or Soho in London or West Hollywood in LA or Le Marais in Paris or what have you. I guess it's because sometimes when something is built with a fortress mentality, it can end up turning into a prison of sorts. There are those who never get out of the gay ghetto much, either physically or mentally. I prefer to mingle with the civilians and hoi polloi. It doesn't mean I won't visit the gay districts from time to time, but I guess it's a matter of "it's a nice place to visit but I wouldn't want to live there".

**IO.** Concerning stereotypes, society lately seems to embrace them more than ever. How did you manage to deal with them and make it work? What is your own opinion about stereotypes?

**BLB.** I'm always reminded of the line in Annie Hall when Woody Allen speculates about







Carol Kane and describes her in very specific terms, and she responds by saying "I love being reduced to a cultural stereotype". Stereotypes are fun to play with, but they can of course be dangerous. Again you have to have the knack of embracing and destroying them at the same time. In cinema you should try to deal in archetypes, not stereotypes. Archetypes are originals that others can pattern themselves after, something universally relevant that can be admired and imitated. Stereotypes are usually crass generalisations. often based on misconceptions. So it's always better to strive to create something original that channels universal concepts or ideas, rather than to rely on other people's petty prejudices.

On Hustler White, being out or in the community doesn't avoid you to notice the huge intent for hedonism on screen, Do you feel close to the homologue Tinto Brass in gay films? Or is it just another way of violence?

**BLB.** I'm deeply embarrassed to say I haven't seen any Tinto Brass films! Otherwise, I'm not sure I understand your question. My films are pornographic or play with the pornographic, and they also often contain scenes of violence or even extreme violence. But even if it's sexual violence, I always try to have some sort of romantic angle to it. The intent isn't to glamourise it, or make it into a commodity, as in contempo-

rary Hollywood, but rather to make the point that romance and tenderness can exist in a harsh and violent world. Sometimes sadomasochism can be performed with a real sense of love and tenderness. One critic famously pointed out, with regard to Hustler White, that in a world full of extreme fetish and sexual violence, the last taboo is tenderness. Ultimately, the movie is about the search for the most normal fetish, the kiss, in an abnormal world where that impulse might be totally unexpected.

**IO.** Outsider gays? Would it be a nice name for the target for artists like you, (As well as John Waters among many others) Do you feel like a cult Director?

**BLB.** I like being considered part of the underground or the avant-garde or as an outsider. I don't mind being called a cult director. It doesn't bother me. There is a kind of reverse snob-bism in the film world about cult directors, particularly from snobbish critics who write for, say, The New Yorker, that thinks that popular film and cinema is the only true cinema, and that underground and cult films are somehow a failure or something to be looked down upon. It's strange, because it used to be the other way around! I think they're just overcompensating. I've never been a pop culture or pop cinema snob myself (i.e., an elitist who looks down his nose at popular genres), but I



also have an appreciation for work that is outside the mainstream and alternative. Like Barbra Streisand says to Robert Redford in *The Way We Were*, "Couldn't we both win?"

**IO.** How relevant is Berlin for your work? With *Otto* you created what seem to be the normal cycle of gay romance in this gay paradise.

**BLB.** I love Berlin, but she can be a harsh mistress. I love the nightlife, I love to boogie, but at times the divinely decadent city of Berlin can be, as the saying goes, a kind of permanent midnight, and that can lead to all sorts of consequences of disaffection. So I enjoy spending weeks or months here, but then I can start to feel like I'm getting sucked into a miasma of sexual excess and decadence. So then I go back to Toronto. It's funny, I've shot two movies in Berlin and two in L.A., and the cities are like night and day, literally. Berlin can be like one long, perpetual night, open til the wee hours and beyond, the grey skies presiding even over the day, whereas L.A. is perpetual sunshine, cars glinting in the sunlight, and a city that closes down not too long after midnight. But I love the opposing cityscapes: the Gothic, brooding, Old European post-war one, and the bright new shiny apocalyptic American one.

**IO.** What do you think of current's movements of supposed

activism? Do you see any gap in a closer future, where violence could make things work out like in Old Times revolutions?

**BLB.** I hope so. Violence is always a tricky proposition. I guess you could say I'm a violent pacifist. I quote Angela Davis in my movie *No Skin Off My Ass* talking about how embracing a philosophy of violence is like embracing the philosophy of suicide. For self preservation, it seems like sometimes you have to bash back. But the problem is you can't internalise it, you have to see it only as a temporary solution to an entrenched and seemingly permanent problem. The new neo-liberal, neo-conservative world order is unquestionably becoming increasingly fascist and casual about its violence, so it may be a matter of survival to resist violently, to fight back. Like it says in my movie *The Raspberry Reich*, "The Arrogance of the Strong Will Be Met by the Violence of the Weak". It's a simple rule for kids to remember.

**IO.** What would you say this generation is missing?

**BLB.** A heart.





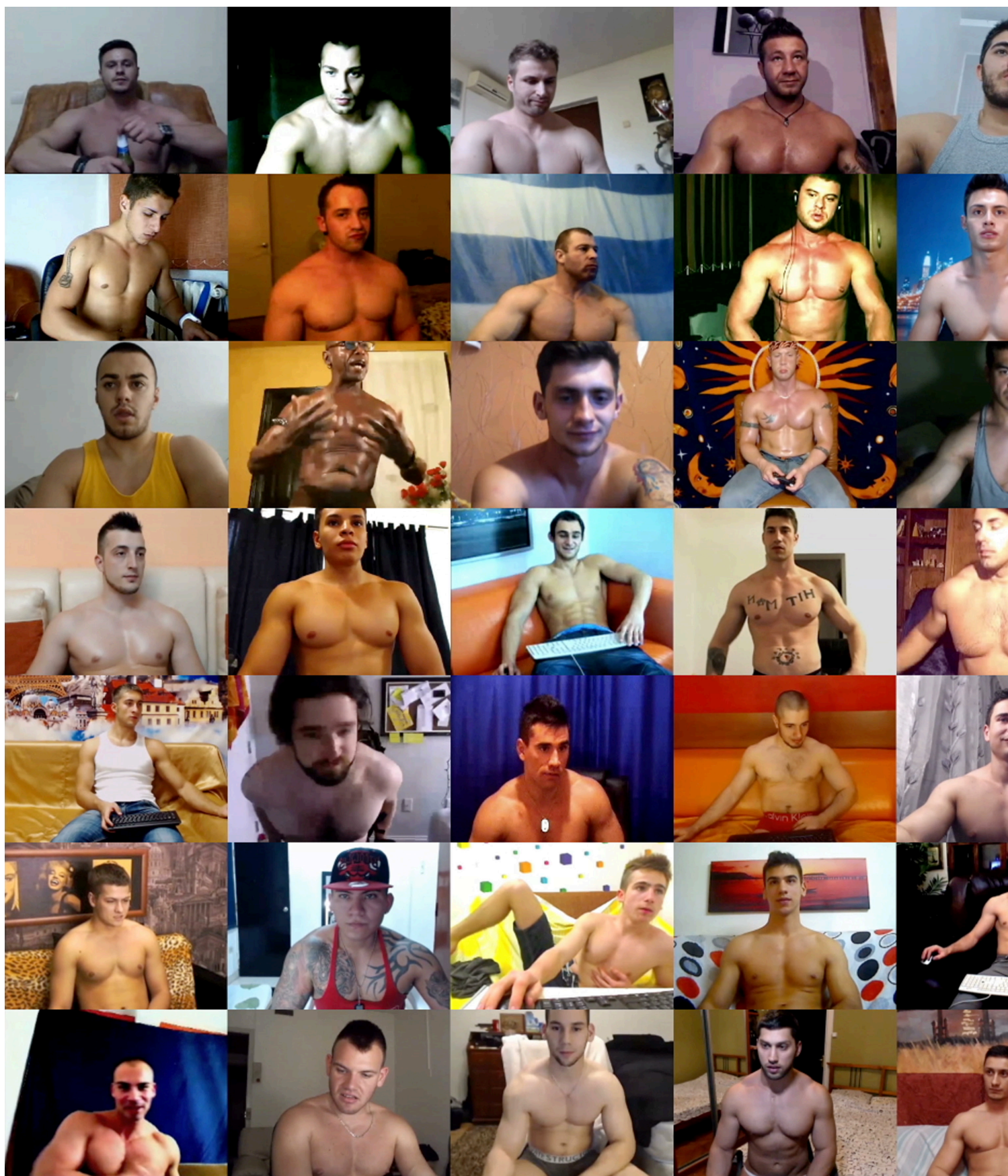


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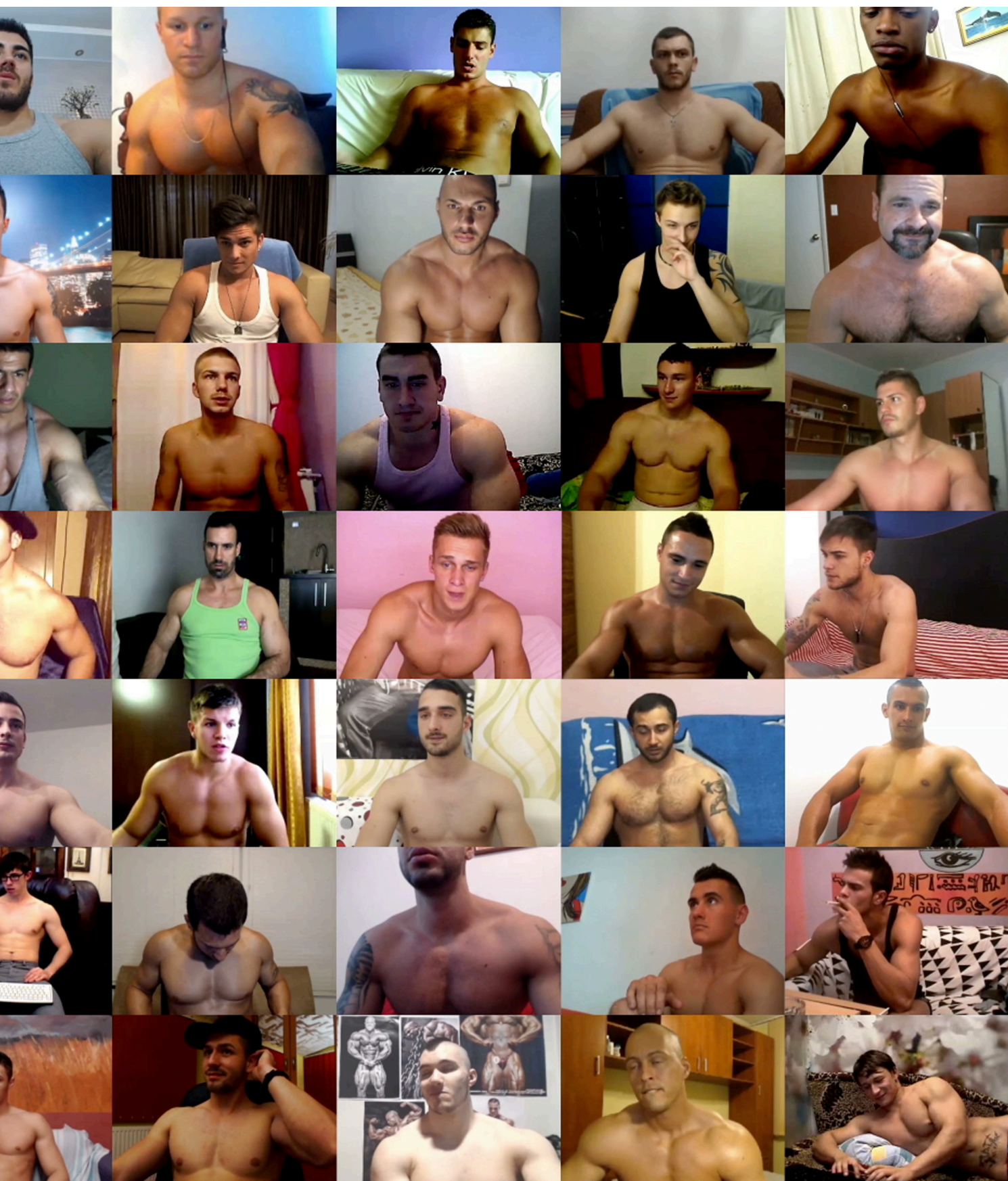


# MOMENT TIME

Hendrik Wolking















**GRO**



**UND**

# APPENDIX

## **Agafonova, Julia**

Interview: Ismael Ogando  
Self-portraits: Julia Agafonova  
© GROUND 2011

## **Jones Alice**

Series: "Swimming"  
Scanned analog prints on paper with dirt.  
© 2010 – 2015

## **Bergen-Aurand, Brian**

Brian Bergen-Aurand teaches film and critical theory at Nanyang Technological University, Singapore, where he focuses on the intersection among cinema, ethics, and embodiment. He is the author of *Cinematic Provocations: Ethics, Justice, Embodiment, and Global Film*, co-author of *The Encyclopedia of Queer Cinema* (with Andrew Grossman), and co-editor of *Transnational Chinese Cinema, Corporeality, Desire, and the Ethics of Failure* (with Mary Mazzilli and Hee Wai Siam). He is the founding editor of the journal *Screen Bodies*, was the sex and gender editor at *Clamor Magazine*, and writes about film, ethics, and embodiment from an anarcho-queer/social collectivist perspective at *Foreign Influence*.

All images courtesy of the contributor.

## **Kavov, Valerie**

An essay on contemporary art © 2015

## **LaBruce, Bruce**

Interview: Ismael Ogando  
Portraits: Xavier Manhing  
© GROUND 2011

## **Le Cam Romain**

*Born, raised and based in Paris, Photography is the personal intimate side of my life, I only use and used analog medium format techniques. I did art and fashion education at Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Arts Decoratifs de Paris and at London College of Fashion.*

*I currently work as art director for luxury brands, I do advertisements campaigns. Also, I keep my photography for projects that are not involving people telling me what to do and I am not interested to make money with it since my daily commercial job in advertisement as an art director gives me this independence.*

*The boys modelling in the serie you've selected are best friends. I am friend with one of the guys' girlfriend. I totally forgot their names. we did these photos on a bored afternoon at my place.*

## **Egelhoff, Andy**

Portrait series included on pp. 115 – 121

## **Gyamfi, Eric**

Eric Gyamfi was born in Ghana, West Africa. Currently living and working in Ghana, his work consists predominantly in self-portraits, usually shot in monochrome. His series of portraits reflect on his country's constant transition to modernity in the light of its traditions and customs, and the people caught in there, with a focus on minorities (women and children) and sexual identity.

Series: "The old ladies of the Gambaga witches Camp" © 2015



## **Lemitz, Jan**

This project has been funded by the Time And Place Project – Fabrica, Brighton the Musée des Beaux-Arts de Calais, FRAC Basse-Normandie Caen and the Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, Norwich.

Photographic series on pp. 160 – 177

## **Lennard, Natasha**

Article: first published in Fusion  
September 03, 2015

Images: *“Look me in the mouth”*  
© Olivia Chaber 2015

## **Low, Amanda**

Amanda is a reformed australian fashion blogger, online marketer, and freelance writer based in Berlin. This is her first contribution for GROUND.

## **Mikloweit, Sascha & Galuppo, Adrianna**

Mikloweit trained in fine art in Düsseldorf, Münster and at Central Saint Martins, London, based in Berlin, Germany.

Galuppo trained in fine art at the Academy of Fine Arts of Milan. She is based in São Paulo, Brazil.

Documentation: Ant Clausen Photography  
Installation view, West side, 7th Liverpool Biennial, Static Gallery © 2012

## **my little airport**

Interview: Suky Choy  
Portraits: Xavier Manhing  
A studio visit in Hong Kong © 2015

## **Naumann, Henrike**

Personal photos from presumed neonazi individuals collected by the artist from their Facebook profiles pp. 59 – 69

## **Ncube, David**

A short story about Berlin © 2015

## **Nel, Daniel Mark**

Flux imagines a desaturated world mediated by ghost shapes. It is a series of atmospheres that take dreaming, death and the bleak and searching soundscapes of electronic composer Darren Cunningham aka Actress as a few of multiple starting points. The compositions are an expression of an inner world which itself is the byproduct of the hyper surveillanced and hyper oppressive global climate. The works position themselves in terrain occupied by Scott's Blade runner, Tarkovsky's Solaris and Wilhelm Sasnal's deft historical imagery.

Digital photography from a series of oil paintings on canvases on pp. 206 – 219  
© 2010–2015

## **Aladag, Nevin**

“Traces”, Wentrup Gallery Berlin, Germany  
6 Juny – 31 July .2015  
Interview: Heiko Thandeka & Antoine Geneviev  
Portrait: Alice Jones.  
© GROUND 2015

## **Njami, Simon**

STADT/BILD. Xenopolis (Image of a City)  
Deutsche Bank KunstHalle, Berlin, Germany  
16 Sep 2015 - 08 Nov 2015

Interview & portrait: Ismael Ogando  
© GROUND 2015

## **Osman, Abdi**

*I can see the love the couples have for each other. The first image though is a very much in your face “these is who we are” while the other is also who we are with a bit of heteronormative performance in terms of respectability and image.*  
Photo selection on pp. 122 – 125  
© 2015

## **Rodriguez, Luis Alberto**

Born in New York City, Luis Alberto Rodriguez trained to become a professional dancer throughout his childhood. He ultimately received his BFA from The Juilliard School in New York, and went on to perform all over the world for the next fifteen years. A self taught photographer, his focus shifted from dance onto photography after moving to Berlin.

Series: "Distortion through motion"

pp. 107 – 113

© 2015

## **Saeed, Mustafa**

Mustafa Saeed (b.1989) is a Somali born artist and based in Hargeisa, Somaliland. His work explores different mediums including Documentary photography, graphics and sound.

Cornered Energies contains photos, and record audio over a slideshow of the photos.

© 2015

## **Wolking, Hendrik**

*The piece is created with recorded footage of webcam performers, who offer peep-shows for paying customers. In their waiting times for interested clients they are public and freely visible for everyone and were recorded with a screen capture program.*

A Big Moment In Time: Film Collage (HD), 53 sec, conceived as looped beamer projection.

© 2014

## **Yaport, Jay**

Interview: Ismael Ogando

Portrait: Jorge Nieto

Images: "MIX" diptych photography

© 2013

**AUTUMN 2015**  
Cover © Dima PSx



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